

SIGHT & SOUND

INTERNATIONAL FILM QUARTERLY • AUTUMN 1989 • £1.80 • US \$3.95



KAURISMAKI

DENYS ARCAND

1871 · HENRY V

CHURCHILL'S
FAVOURITE FILM

THE LONDON •INTERNATIONAL• FILM SCHOOL

- Training film makers for over 30 years •
- Graduates now working worldwide •
- Located in Covent Garden in the heart of London •
 - Recognised by A.C.T.T. •
- 16mm documentary & 35mm studio filming •
- Two year Diploma course in film making
commences three times a year: January, April, September •

**London International Film School, Department S28, 25 Shelton Street, London WC2H 9HP
01-836 0826**

SIGHT & SOUND

INTERNATIONAL FILM QUARTERLY • AUTUMN 1989 • VOLUME 58 No 4

Editor: Penelope Houston

Associate Editor: John Pym

Design: Geoff Wiggins

Publications Manager: John Smoker



SIGHT AND SOUND is an independent critical magazine sponsored and published by the British Film Institute. It is not an organ for the expression of official BFI policy, signed articles represent the views of their authors.

In the Picture Shadow of China/Moscow/Cinecittà and the new technology/ 218
Nevsky Live/Midnight Sun Festival/MystFest/Edinburgh Television/
Edinburgh Film.

◀ **Where Have the Foreign Films Gone?** 224
Julian Petley surveys the exhibition and distribution chances of subtitled films in Britain and learns of the 'Jean de Florette syndrome'.

The Eyes of Canada Gerald Pratley reports on the jamboree for the 50th anniversary of the National Film Board and the question mark against its future. 229

The Improbable Rise of Denys Arcand John Harkness traces 234
the principled career of the Canadian director of *Jésus de Montréal*.

Framed From the fainting Guardsman to the Prince of Denmark: 240
Richard Mayne profiles Daniel Day-Lewis.

1871: Writing History in Lightning 242
James Leahy on location with a radical costume drama, Ken McMullen's *1871*, set against the backdrop of the Paris Commune and shot partly in a Portuguese theatre.

Framework to Mainframe 248
The film magazine *Framework*, founded Warwick University, 1975, was the basis of three singular careers: John Pym investigates.

◀ **Aki Kaurismäki Goes Business** 'Pug-ugly butchers . . . a bunch of 252
Finnish guys who never take off their Ray-Bans.' William Fisher celebrates Aki Kaurismäki, Finland's busiest film-maker.

Double Takes J. J. Hunsecker's first despatch: movie geography, cold 255
bodies at press shows, Puttnam's Columbia figures . . .

Henry V Jill Forbes assesses Olivier's classic and Branagh's gauntlet. 258

◀ **War Record** What was Churchill's favourite movie? 260
How 7lbs of lentils helped the war effort. The Second World War began 50 years ago; Charles Barr reports from the Public Record Office.

The Music Room 266
A chapter from Andrew Robinson's forthcoming biography of Satyajit Ray.

Homeward Bound Mark Mordue talks to Gillian Armstrong 270
about an MGM feature and a modest series of documentaries on the lives of three Australian working-class women.

◀ **China, the Wind and Joris Ivens** 273
Peter Green on the Old Master's triumphant last film.

Film Reviews The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover/ 277
Melancholia/New York Stories/Camp de Thiaroye/Do the Right Thing.

Book Reviews The Hidden Cinema/An Empire of Their Own/ 283
The Moving Image/The Man Who Shot Garbo and Light Years.

On Now 288



On the cover: Ana Padrão and Roshan Seth in '1871'. Photo: Frank Connor.

Copyright © 1989 by The British Film Institute. EDITORIAL OFFICES: British Film Institute, 21 Stephen Street, London W1P 1PL. 01-255 1444. Telex: 27624. Fax: 01-436 7950. ADVERTISING OFFICE: D. A. Goodall Ltd, 65/66 Shoreditch High Street, London E1 6JH. 01-739 7679. Fax: 01-729 7185. Printed in England. Published and distributed in the USA by SIGHT AND SOUND, Eastern News Distributors Inc., 1671 East 16th Street, Suite 176, Brooklyn, NY 11229.

SHADOW OF CHINA

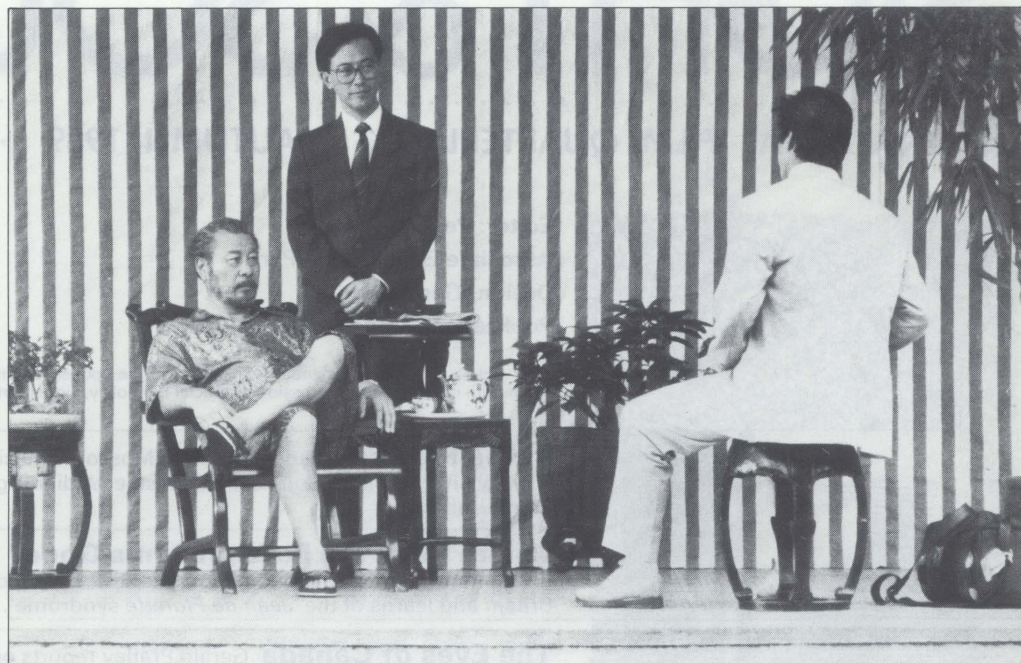
A Japanese view of 1997

'I think Hong Kong needs reassurance more than an exit visa right now. I think Britain has an obligation and a responsibility to gather the world together to solve this problem. If Singapore can be independent, I don't know why Hong Kong can't be. I don't understand politics, I don't pretend to. I really wish I could participate, to generate interest in independence. Hong Kong is unique, Hong Kong is not China... I don't want to sound like a naive artist...'

John Lone, who not so long ago starred in Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor*, is clearly frustrated, face to face with the limitations of Art confronted by History. We are talking on the Hong Kong set of *Shadow of China*, the film he is making with Japanese director Mitsuo Yanagimachi, whose last film, the broodingly austere *Fire Festival*, was a hit at the 1985 LFF. History has been intruding not just as a result of Tiananmen Square, but because the film's subject has been deliberately positioned in the shadow of the 1997 handover.

Based on the novel *Snakehead* by Masaaki Nishiki, the film focuses initially on a seemingly naive, love-struck Japanese journalist. On assignment in Hong Kong, he is sidetracked by bigger game, the self-made millionaire and corporate takeover mastermind Henry Wong (Lone). Investigating Wong, the journalist begins to uncover a mosaic of past identities that lead back to the discovery (revealed to the viewer in the prologue) that Wong was a leader of the Cultural Revolution's Red Guards. Forced to flee China in 1976 after the deposition of the Gang of Four, he has been amassing power in Hong Kong in anticipation of 1997—notably by taking over Japanese-owned businesses poised to withdraw their assets from the colony.

Although Akira, the journalist, is played by the top Japanese box-office draw Koichi Sato, it is Wong who becomes the film's dramatic centre as he locks horns with the triad-linked owner of a Hong Kong newspaper. If Lone's casting, which acknowledges this co-production's need for a star familiar to the West, does not underline Wong's centrality, the obvious metaphorical resonances of the character do. The revelation that Wong is in fact *Japanese* by birth seals a reading of his character as embodying Hong Kong's present crisis of



Shadow of China: Roy Chiao, Frederick Mao, Koichi Sato.

identity, culture and nationhood.

'Hong Kong is like one of the main characters,' says Yanagimachi. 'It is the clash of West and East, and the story itself has this subtle relationship between the Japanese and the Chinese... Which is something of an understatement since, owing to the Second World War and current economic competition, the Japanese are widely disliked in Hong Kong. But doesn't the suppression of Wong's identity—as revolutionary, as drug- and child-smuggler, as Japanese—correspond to the suppression of Hong Kong's identity under colonialism and rampant capitalism, in contrast to both China and Japan? Hong Kong doesn't have a clear identity or origin. The British can say they created it and the Chinese can say they did, but neither is true. It has ambiguous parentage.'

Yanagimachi's films have been marked by a sense of cultural dislocation. Traditional and modern Japan face off uneasily. In *Fire Festival*, there is tension between the protagonist's muscular pantheism and his community's social and economic upheaval; and modern Japan induces a similar state of alienation in the protagonists of *A Farewell to the Land* (1982) and *A Nineteen-Year-Old's Plan* (1979). Yanagimachi is now probing the same questions beyond Japan's boundaries. Does he feel akin to Wenders in this respect? 'I've always wished I could die like a drunken bum in a small town in Spain in the middle of nowhere. I never wanted to be buried in the normal traditional way in Japan, with people seeing me off.'

Shadow of China is certainly

about the way history has a habit of catching up with its fugitives. A rough cut of an early scene finds Wong and his British mistress Katherine (Sammi Davis) at an outdoor party for the privileged colonials. Shot with a lush texture reminiscent of Visconti, its commentary on decadence is reinforced by Wong's encounter with a ghost from his revolutionary past, his lost-love Moo-Ling (Vivian Wu, also from *The Last Emperor*), who crashes the event with the journalist. Wong is periodically visited by his past, both in physical and spectral forms, and the film seems to occupy the space between notions of history and spiritual destiny. Yet it always returns to the reality of 1997—without ever quite tackling it head on since all it represents for now is a question mark.

The production has certainly found the real world catching up with it; and the American coproducer Elliott Lewitt for one believes that the ending will have to be rethought in the light of the events of June 1989. 'I feel the need to respond to events which have changed the world in which we are making this movie. It will never recover from that.' If, as the present ending suggests, Wong views China as the Motherland and his and Hong Kong's reunion with it as a new beginning, the absence of ambivalence will be unpersuasive. The production's state of flux was echoed for some time by the lack of a title. Ideas were bandied about for weeks and a Los Angeles title consultancy, Poetic Justice, faxed seemingly daily lists of suggestions before they settled on *Shadow of China*.

Despite a flourishing home

film industry, Hong Kong as a city has never really been put on screen for international audiences. Is Yanagimachi, who is using many extraordinary locations (such as the terrace of a house perched at the top of Victoria Peak, the city laid out below), putting things straight? 'Whenever I come to Hong Kong I always feel the rawness of it, the smell, the clash of different cultures, I don't want to show that in a realistic way. I want to make it more like, say, Shanghai or Berlin 40 or 50 years ago, to create a different reality.'

GAVIN SMITH

MOSCOW

East meets West on business

There's nothing new about East-West joint ventures. Fiat's Togliattigrad car factory has been cranking out Unos and Tipos since 1971. Now an East-West assembly line is being set up to mass produce films and television programmes—at least if one is to believe the talk at this year's Moscow Film Festival.

Announcements of Soviet coproductions with Britain, the United States, France and Italy—ranging from a 12-hour TV series about Russian history to a \$22 million film about Genghis Khan—were the order of the day. But like other recently coined buzz words, the term 'joint venture' is used with special creative licence in the Moscow entertainment industry. In Soviet film circles, *perestroika* can describe the wider dimensions of today's casting couch; *glasnost* can mean the redder

hue of blood and guts in recent action pictures. And 'joint venture' can refer to almost anything that brings hard currency to the Soviets without also bringing them debt, risk or excessive toil.

In one recent example of East-West business-without-cash, the Soviet state television network, Gostelradio, adopted the western technique of 'bartering' for programmes rather than purchasing them outright. It is by this means that TV viewers across the Soviet Union were able to sit down this summer to four days of *The Benny Hill Show*, *Minder* and *The Bill*. The programmes were supplied by Thames Television in return for six minutes of advertising per hour, which was then sold to Coca-Cola, Shell Oil, Singapore Airlines, DHL courier services and Kit-Kat candy bars. The question is: if business with the Soviets is such a curious and non-remunerative affair, why do it?

The answer is that the Soviet Union presents an immense potential market for product. Until the rouble is convertible, joint ventures are the only feasible way to get a piece of that market. On co-production deals, for example, the Soviets typically furnish facilities and labour, with the western partner providing everything that real money can buy, from film stock to laboratory services.

'Our Soviet partners were keen on our taking charge of those things that don't exist in the USSR,' French producer Marin Karmitz told me in Moscow, referring to his \$2m Franco-Soviet co-production, Pavel Louguin's *Taxi Blues*. 'Sound technology is especially important for them. The Soviets don't usually employ direct sound recording so this is a great opportunity for them to learn about its use.'

But the most novel joint ventures hatched in Moscow weren't co-productions. For over a year now, a number of western companies have been racing to open movie theatres in the USSR. Warner Brothers is reported to be in the last stages of negotiating the creation of cinemas in Moscow and Leningrad. But the first western country to succeed in this area was the Soviets' next-door neighbour, Finland. In May 1988, the country's largest theatre owner, Finnkin, rented a 60-seat cinema café in Tallinn, capital of the Soviet Republic of Estonia. Serviced by an Estonian staff, it was to programme Finnkin's roster of (principally Finnish) films.

'We were very pleased when the Estonians told us at the end of the year that they had turned a profit of 25,000 roubles,' recalls Jukka Makela, director of Finn-

kin. 'We then exchanged telexes over the next six months in an effort to see some of the money. With each telex the sum dwindled—from 25,000 to 10,000 to 5,000. Finally, they told us that the cash had simply disappeared. All of it.'

Undaunted by the Finns' experience, the French were next up for a joint exhibition venture. The Gallic 'major' Union Générale Cinématographique (UGC) entered into an agreement with Sovexportfilm and a French agricultural group to take control of Moscow's 1,200 seat Mir cinema. Inaugurated at the festival, the joint venture announced plans to programme French films in the cinema. At the same time, the group was to release between 10 to 15 Soviet titles in France through UGC's cinema chain and to market Soviet films and programmes to French television. The partners were also working on a scheme of 'non-convertibility compensation' to invest rouble earnings in co-production, or to use them to purchase other Soviet goods to be exported through the French agricultural partner.

Here too, however, certain 'cultural differences' got in the way of business. 'One of the stumbling blocks for the creation of our joint venture was the question of support staff,' commented one of the French architects of the plan. 'Between the projectionists, electricians, ticket-sellers, concessionaires and the rest, there are more than 100 people working at the Mir. We felt that 20-30 would be more appropriate, but the Soviets are insistent on maximising employment.'

On the other hand, the Mir could be a giant windfall for the French partners. French films that attract 3-5 million viewers

in France typically draw between 30-50 million Soviet spectators. Until now, the French have had to content themselves with a ludicrously small flat fee; under the new arrangement, French producers will receive a percentage of box-office revenues.

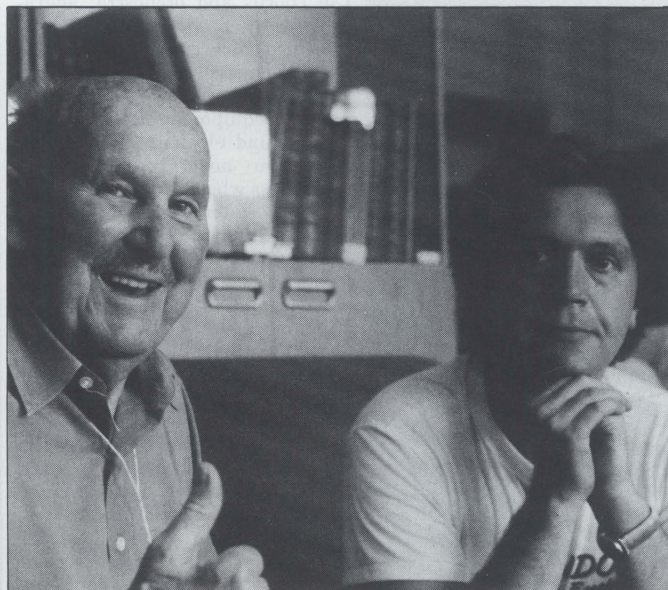
Then there's the Moscow Festival editions of the London-based trade magazine *Screen International*, another joint venture with Sovexportfilm. Between the conception and the execution of *Screen's* Moscow initiative were translators who spoke no English, ever-truant chauffeured Volgas and consignments of paper lost between Helsinki and Moscow Publishing House No 6. Finally, *Screen International's* three issues came out—on time and in order.

Of course, all the official information and schedules printed in them had meanwhile been changed by the festival organisers. And with their slightly irregular typeface and grainy photographs, the *Screen* issues had the distinctive look of having been printed in the Soviet Union. But, of course, that was the whole point. Before this venture, no one at Moscow Printing House No 6 would believe that they could set and print a full-colour magazine in the space of a few days. Now, presumably, they know better.

The effort even garnered such disparate accolades as a letter from Margaret Thatcher and a boozy, back-slapping lunch, compliments of the *apparatchiki* from Sovexportfilm. So it was that the twain of East and West met in Moscow. As one festival guest told me, the East-West joint venture represents a higher stage of socialism: capitalism with a human face.

WILLIAM FISHER

East-West. Michael Powell in Moscow with Yuri Tsivian, future BFI visiting research fellow. Photo: Ian Christie.



THE COPPOLA CONNECTION

Cinecittà and the new technology

At the same time that Fellini announced he was not going to shoot his new film *Voices from the Moon* at Cinecittà, where he has made most of his films since *The White Sheik* (he wrapped *Voices* in early July at the Pontini Studios, ex-de Laurentiis, now Pathé), the word leaked in Rome that Francis Coppola had decided to set up shop there. Indeed, Cinecittà has been Coppola's base in 1989 not only for pre-production on *Godfather 3*, but also for a mysterious film that he wistfully calls *Secret Journal*.

It is all very symptomatic. Hollywood-on-the-Tiber is dead. Long live Zoetrope-on-the-Tiber. Fellini had to abandon Cinecittà, which he had so often described as his 'real home', because he could no longer build the kind of rural village which he needed for *Voices*.

Anyone visiting Cinecittà can see why. If you walk down the main avenue towards Stage 5—where Fellini rebuilt *Via Veneto* for *La Dolce Vita* and where in recent years he had his offices—you see at the end of the road enormous tenement buildings stretching where once there was a horizon which served as backdrop to the Palestine of *Ben-Hur* or the Rome of *Quo Vadis*?

Cinecittà 2 is a new satellite residential and shopping area. The land, which was part of the state-owned Cinecittà territory, was sold by the present management to pay off the studio's debts accumulated in the 1970s. They were proud of coming out of the red, but quickly had to think up a new image for the studios which, having passed the 50th anniversary since they were opened by Mussolini in 1937, needed to look towards 2000, when the old style of filmmaking craftsmanship—of which Fellini is probably the last exponent—will be completely out.

That's how the 'Coppola connection' happened. The Lucas people have also been around at Cinecittà, giving advice on how the studios can update their facilities for the new technologies. Though Terry Gilliam may have grumbled a bit about some aspects of his shoot in Rome, he is the first to admit that he found wonderful technical and creative collaboration from the Italians who worked on *Baron Munchausen*, and not only from the artist-craftsmen like cinematographer Giuseppe Rotunno and art director Dante Ferretti. Among the eyesores at Cinecittà

today is a great steel box housing the 'blue screen' apparatus which enabled Gilliam to shoot some of the most dazzling effects of *Munchausen*.

Cinecittà's eagerness to promote its availability to the Coppolas and Lucases was the real incentive for an event held in Milan last spring. It was called the 'Leonardo Project' because the organisers wanted to suggest that art and science can work together in the cinema with the same creative impulses that inspired the great Renaissance artist. It's true that Rome's international airport is also named after Leonardo da Vinci, and it can't always be relied on to provide the best in advanced technology. The central attraction of the Leonardo Project was to have been the first screening of a twenty-minute film made—at Cinecittà, of course—by Douglas Trumbull, using the Showscan system which he invented and so far has used only for travelogue material.

Trumbull is one of those whom Cinecittà brought over to help reorganise the studio's technological facilities. The state distribution company Istituto Luce—like Cinecittà itself under the aegis of Ente Cinema, the Italian public cinema board—has bought the rights to Showscan for Italy and will convert several cinemas to the system in the course of the next year. It was decided to commission Trumbull to make the short *Leonardo's Dream*, which could give an idea of how the system could be used in storytelling, with actors in close-up.

As it turned out, *Leonardo's Dream* didn't make cinema history, but since it wasn't even

shown with adequate Showscan facilities, it probably wasn't fair to blame Trumbull. The Leonardo Project people hadn't succeeded in finding the right space in which an audience could be involved in the action. It was shown instead on an improvised 70mm screen in a room without raked seating in Milan's Museum of Science. Not surprisingly, the screening attracted fewer people than an exhibition of Carlo Rambaldi's 'monsters' in the same building. But Trumbull himself considered the experiment positive. For the first time he had been able to employ Showscan—using 70mm film at 60 frames a second—for people rather than landscape.

Workshops and debates, at which the Italian professionals and students had a chance to learn from their highly qualified visitors, were the best part of the week-long Leonardo Project. Among the special prizes handed out at La Scala opera house during the final night gala, the one that seemed most justified went to Michelangelo Antonioni, who was making his first public appearance in Italy since the stroke which left him semi-paralysed five years ago. It was Antonioni, after all, who had first experimented with the 'new technology' when he made *The Oberwald Mystery* in 1981.

Electronic film-making has taken giant steps since then, but Antonioni was a pioneer, followed by Coppola with *One From the Heart*. Both were criticised for making 'lesser' films. In retrospect, one can recognise that they risked their own reputations in order to help the cinema move into the future.

JOHN FRANCIS LANE

Douglas Trumbull and Giuseppe Rotunno.



NEVSKY LIVE

Prokofiev, Cairns and Ashkenazy

Silent films with live orchestral accompaniment are now a regular feature of the London scene, but the prospect of a *sound* film with live accompaniment ruffled a few critical feathers. Doubting advance press comments did not, however, prevent the Royal Festival Hall from being comfortably filled in July for the presentation of Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky* (1938), with Prokofiev's great score performed by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Brighton Festival Chorus and Christine Cairns (soloist), conducted by Vladimir Ashkenazy.

This followed several successful American performances produced by John Goberman, whose obsession with the score seemingly derived from dissatisfaction with the original soundtrack, with its boxy sound and flat orchestral recording. A new print was obtained from the Soviet Archive and the music track removed, leaving just the dialogue and sound effects.

Prokofiev's 1939 cantata taken from the score only lasts about 40 minutes; drawing on this, the arranger William D. Brohn was obliged to repeat certain passages (mainly choruses) and add other bits and pieces to fill in silences on the track. Apart from a rather dubious 'overture', what we heard seemed to be authentic Prokofiev, with all the main set-pieces from the film intact.

Unfortunately, in this kind of operation, aesthetic aspirations are sometimes foiled by technology. After about ten minutes, it was apparent that the soundtrack, despite clever timing on Ashkenazy's part, was resolutely detached from the live splendour of chorus and orchestra, aggravated by a voice track which seemed thick and muffled, as if it had been recorded at the end of a tunnel. This may have been due to the equipment used, but the two sound elements (screen and platform) never meshed into a seamless whole.

In the later stages, when most of the dialogue ceases and the film concentrates on battle and pageantry, the presentation moved on to another plane, making one wish that Eisenstein had shot the whole film silent. As the Russian and German squadrons prepare for the Battle on the Ice, one heard for the first time new details in the score such as the growing dissonances in the brass, allied to hard, savage bowings in the cellos and basses. Most dramatic of all was the great percussion attack accompanying the scene where the

Teutonic Knights sink beneath the ice.

The Lament for the Dead (movingly sung by Christine Cairns) gained considerable emotional weight by being heard live, despite the interruptions of a few words from the soundtrack. After that, it only needed the final tableau (Alexander's warning to the enemies of Mother Russia), with Ashkenazy urging his chorus and orchestra to a victorious apotheosis, for the show to be greeted with the kind of ovation one has heard at *Napoleon* and *Ben-Hur*.

Even so, doubts remain about future experiments on these lines. Film sound and concert hall sound are clearly acoustically different and even with the best equipment are likely always to appear separated. For example, a greater challenge would be another Eisenstein/Prokofiev collaboration, *Ivan the Terrible*, where so much of the music is wrapped around the dialogue, accompanying and commenting at the same time.

In any case, there are surely enough great silent films waiting to be given the *de luxe* treatment.

JOHN GILLET

LAPLAND

Films round the clock in a tepee

Any event that can bring together Krzysztof Kieslowski, John Berry, Otar Ioseliani and Paul Morrissey under one roof must have something going for it. In fact, the remarkable Midnight Sun Film Festival, held each June in Sodankylä, Lapland, has quite a lot going for it. The sun never sets, films are shown round the clock in a tepee, and directors from around the world gather to soak up inspiration and grain spirits.

All this cinephilic madness takes place under the artistic direction of Peter van Bagh, Finnish film critic, historian, director and publisher. It is thanks to his eclectic taste and the organisational skills of executive director Erkki Astala that the festival has been a hit four years running. The peerless setting in the Arctic tundra hasn't hurt either.

The tribute to Ioseliani included some of the none too frequently seen Georgian films on which his reputation is based. The John Berry *homage* included *He Ran All the Way* (1951), made before Berry was driven from Hollywood by the blacklist and also notable for John Garfield's last screen appearance. And the retrospective of Kieslowski's work was especially timely. The Polish director's

reputation has grown enormously in the year since the Cannes screening of *A Short Film about Killing*, which went on to win the first European Film Award, but few have had the opportunity to see much of his earlier work.

Kieslowski's remarkable ability to redeem the most grisly of detail was already in evidence in the short documentary *The Hospital* (1976). His fixation with the uncertain place of individual choice in Polish society is apparent in *The Bricklayer* (1973). It was after abandoning documentary for fiction five years ago, however, that he really began freely to develop his brand of visionary civic-minded pessimism.

Other film-makers on hand at the Midnight Sun festival included Idressa Ouedraogo (*Yaaba*), from Burkina Faso; Andi Engel (*Melancholia*); Uta Wieland (*Year of the Turtle*); the Estonian Peeter Urbla (*I'm Not a Tourist, I Live Here*); Peruvian Rafael Drinot of the Grupo Chaski (*Julia*); Soviet Vadim Abrashitov (*The Manservant*); and Basque film-maker Ana Diez (*Ander and Yul*). Also on view: a superbly restored print of Feuillade's *Judex* (1916), and a handful of inventive new Finnish films, including Aki Kaurismäki's *Leningrad Cowboys Go America* and *Ariel* and Mika Kaurismäki's *Cha Cha Cha*.

WILLIAM FISHER

MYSTFEST

Film noir's alphabet city

The shadows of 'black' film and literature fell over the Adriatic town of Cattolica in June as MystFest celebrated its tenth anniversary with a homage to noir. As befits a festival devoted to research and debate, retrospectives of film and critical writing were the keynote. This was the year of the veterans: a tribute to pulp writer David Goodis occasioned a panel appearance by his friend Sam Fuller and a preview of the sadly flaccid *Street of No Return*, scripted by Fuller and Jacques Bral from a Goodis novel.

Of the eleven other films shown, Vincent Sherman's routine *The Unfaithful* (1947) was scripted by Goodis, while the extraordinary *The Burglar* (Paul Wendkos, 1957) was adapted by him from his own novel. Whatever the dubious aesthetic merits of Delmer Daves' *Dark Passage* or Beineix's *La Lune dans le Caniveau*, they, and such old favourites as *Tirez sur le Pianiste*, benefited from being seen in the context of Goodis' melancholic perspective.

A Joseph H. Lewis retro-



Dead Calm: Sam Neill and Nicole Kidman.

spective included the stylish and sexually equivocal *The Big Combo* (1954) and, probably the festival's best film, *Gun Crazy* (1949). Suffused with ambivalent desire and avoiding the moral judgment on its characters which would have made it just another fugitive-couple social-problem picture, *Gun Crazy* remains an almost perfect expression of the genre's relentless death drive.

In Christian Bauer's contemplative documentary *As Simple as That: Joseph Lewis in Hollywood*, Lewis explained how he shot *Gun Crazy*'s famous bank robbery sequence, and expounded on the studio system, the lean Depression years and his abrupt decision to quit film-making before it killed him: a clever, thoughtful personality determined to retain his integrity in the Hollywood jungle.

The role of the city and the country in film noir came up in debate, the Italian theorist Guido Fink proposing that the noir city is an alphabet city, laced with words, letters and signs, which displays a neurotic terror of silence and the unnamed.

The main order of business, however, to which the debates and retrospectives were a stimulating accompaniment, were the new mystery and crime films (new at least to Italy). The British entries were documentarist Nick Broomfield's disappointing first feature *Diamond Skulls*, with Gabriel Byrne as the pathologically jealous aristocrat protected by his family when he tries to kill his wife, and writer-

director Anthony Simmons' *Little Sweetheart* (already seen here on television), with John Hurt and Karen Young as a couple on the run blackmailed by two young girls. In the latter, Cassie Baraschi's disquieting performance as the young Thelma was given special mention by the jury.

The top prize went to *Criminal Law*, television director Martin Campbell's first theatrical feature, about the dubious involvement of a dynamic young defence attorney with his client, a serial killer. Gary Oldman is memorable as attorney Ben Chase, but on the whole Mark Kasdan's script on the *Doppelgänger* theme fails to persuade. The most enjoyable films, however, were out of competition: the hit of the festival being *Dead Calm*, Philip Noyce's skilfully directed version of Charles Williams' nautical novel (one of Orson Welles' unfinished projects, *The Deep*), which makes masterly use of panoramic seascapes and the confinement of the boat setting both to build and release tension.

Patrice Leconte's quiet adaptation of the Simenon novel *Monsieur Hire* was a coolly detached look at a man's sexual obsession which also managed to be poignantly affecting. *Out Cold* by Malcolm Mowbray was an hilarious 'where's the body' thriller starring Teri Garr. And Robert Dornhelm's *Cold Feet* was an offbeat caper involving a prize stallion and some emeralds; featuring a lunatic Tom Waits, this is one to look forward to.

PAM COOK

EDINBURGH: TELEVISION

The franchise holders and the bogeyman

In one respect at least, it was altogether fitting that Rupert Murdoch should give the James MacTaggart Memorial Lecture at the opening of this year's Edinburgh Television Festival, since the imminent arrival of satellite television has hung over debates at the last two festivals like a sword of Damocles. Before that, of course, the bogeyman was cable, which led to Ted Turner being invited to do the MacTaggart honours in 1982; although perhaps 'insult' might be a better word, since it's hard to think of two people whose ideas about television could be more diametrically opposed to MacTaggart's than Messrs Murdoch and Turner.

Murdoch's speech, with its attacks on a television system 'obsessed with class, dominated by anti-commercial attitudes and with a tendency to hark back to the past', has already been widely reported and discussed. But what was particularly interesting about the event was the polite, and even occasionally enthusiastic, response to this scourge of the media establishment.

Was this simply politeness, an expression of one of the 'values of the narrow elite' which Murdoch professes to despise? After all, he seemed uncustomarily nervous, and was reading a speech which, with its references to Adam Smith (in the first sentence!) and Macaulay, had, it was widely assumed, been written by someone else. The hot money was on Andrew Neil (not present, incidentally), although the *Independent's* Maggie Brown suggested Cento Veljanovski of the right-wing think tank, the Institute of Economic Affairs, who was there and who earlier this year published a collection of essays, *Freedoms in Broadcasting*, the same title that Murdoch gave his speech.

Murdoch's complaints about 'vested interests', 'drama run by the costume department' and 'the British broadcasting elite' had a peculiarly familiar ring. Where had we heard all this before? Why, of course, at Edinburgh television festivals in the late 1970s and early 80s—only then these sentiments were being expressed by the young Turks of the Left. In a telling microcosm of the present political situation in Britain, Murdoch's 'we are the radicals now' rhetoric effectively confused and paralysed the opposition by stealing its clothes.

This sense of paralysis persisted throughout the festival, which was rightly criticised by Central's Bob Phillis for its 'lack of passion'. Michael Grade suggested that its underlying theme was less the stated 'New Television' but, rather, fear of change. 'We are in danger of talking ourselves into a complete depression about the future,' he warned.

Fear was also the theme of one of the most stimulating moments of the festival, an all-too-rare appearance by George Russell, Chairman of the IBA and soon-to-be ITC, in a session entitled 'The New Regulators'. According to Russell, the real problem facing the broadcasting system at the moment is not so much the 1992 franchise auctions as the self-destructive atmosphere of 'sheer fear' which is at present haunting ITV.

Pointing out that recent statements by the Home Secretary suggest the government is going to put the equivalent of a 'Becher's brook' quality fence into what had previously threatened to be a franchise flat race, he delivered a stern warning. 'Only people capable of running high-quality franchises will get over that fence. Existing ITV companies have the advantage. But if they slide backwards, or put all their best programmes on the Astra satellite in the next three years, it might be different.' What a pity, then, that there were so few ITV executives there to hear him—but perhaps they were too busy deciding how to gobble each other up, turn their companies into facilities houses, or get out of television altogether.

The same session also contained a warning by Lord Rees-Mogg, resplendent in grey suit and brown suede shoes, that if the Broadcasting Standards Council is seen as ineffective and, like the Press Council, loses the respect of those whom it is supposed to be overseeing, 'then the next step will be looked at'. The suggestion here seemed to be not that the BSC will actively seek stronger or statutory powers but that lobbyists and Tory backbenchers would build up a head of steam behind demands for something considerably tougher. In other words, the message to the broadcasters was—better the devil you know than the devil you don't.

Rees-Mogg thought such a situation unlikely, however, because similar sorts of people are appointed to the top jobs in both the BSC and the BBC/ITC. 'There's nothing sinister in this,' he added. 'Ex-headmasters are the best qualified people for such jobs. There is no other option.' Unfortunately, I was too busy taking notes to see Rees-Mogg's



Ron Silver in *Fellow Traveller*. Photo: Lu Jeffery.

face as he uttered these immortal lines, but my companion assured me that not a trace of a smile passed across it. It was one of the nicer ironies of the festival that such a perfect example of Establishment attitudes should have been expressed by one of Rupert Murdoch's former employees; and one, moreover, who professed to agree with much of what he said, 'though I found I was left with a number of problems.'

If the session on 'Pornography, Erotica and Percy Filth' was anything to go by, then the BSC does indeed look set to encounter problems in the future, not from the ex-schoolmasters at the BBC or the ITC, but from satellite companies not subject to British regulation. Indeed, Rees-Mogg had earlier pointed out that the biggest challenge to accepted standards of taste and decency was likely to come from these quarters, and Colin Shaw of the BSC indicated that the Council expects to play a key role in defining what would constitute a breach of the articles in the European Broadcasting Convention governing violence and pornography.

It's extremely hard, however, to imagine how any pan-EC convention could encompass, say, both the sex films now shown on France's Canal Plus and the relatively strict guidelines about the portrayal of sex which govern British television. In this context, it should be remembered that when British newspapers were full of tut-tutting stories about stripping house-

wives on Italian TV, the Italians replied with attacks on British puritanism. Perhaps it was the perceived impossibility of reconciling British and continental standards which contributed to this session's feeling that a surrender to a flood of alien porn was probably inevitable.

According to Michael Grade, the biggest threat to British television in the future will come not from the pornographers but from the advertisers. 'Advertisers are going to get closer and closer to the programme-making decisions. The Chinese walls between programmes and advertising sales directors will come tumbling down.' An increasing number of programmes are likely to be devised with the aid of market research to find out whether they will appeal to the specific viewers whom specific advertisers are endeavouring to reach.

Some final thoughts. Why were the sessions devoted to sex and money so full that the doors had to be guarded against the ticketless hordes, whereas a session on black and Asian people and television was almost empty? Why, when the two most illuminating contributions to the festival came from women (Germaine Greer and Kate Adie), were there not more women on the panels? And lastly, why was the session on television criticism (valiantly chaired though it was by Alex Graham) the dullest and most dispiriting event I've ever witnessed in Edinburgh?

JULIAN PETLEY

EDINBURGH: FILM

David Robinson's one-hander

Edinburgh's 43rd Film Festival, organised at extremely short notice by David Robinson, critic of *The Times*, did better than anyone expected under trying circumstances. It was originally to have been co-directed by Robinson and Krzysztof Zanussi, but the Polish film-maker, busy on pre-production for his next project, took little part in the proceedings and resigned before the festival opened.

Robinson's chief coup, apart from his benign and cheery presence as front man, was to persuade Lady Chaplin to endow the Charles Chaplin New Directors Award in commemoration of the centenary, and to institute three other prizes for student film-makers, given by the BBC and Virgin. Fortunately, it seemed a good year for both competitions and there were worthy winners as well as a large entry. The first Chaplin Award went to the Indian director Shaji for the impressive *Piravi*, about the effects on a family of their son's disappearance during Mrs Gandhi's State of Emergency, which I reviewed earlier from Delhi.

A great many of the films displayed either at Filmhouse or the Cameo—the city's bigger commercial cinemas were not used this year—had been seen at other festivals. But several now took centre stage: Maggie Greenwald's *The Kill-Off*, Ian Sellar's *Venus Peter*, Mathias Allary's *Franta* and Michael Lehmann's *Heathers*. And brand new films such as Philip Saville's *Fellow Traveller*, Lewis Gilbert's *Shirley Valentine*, Michael Hoffman's *Sisters* and Rangel Vulchanov's *Where Do We Go From Here?* also made their mark. There seemed, in fact, quite a lot to discover, which is what an Edinburgh Film Festival must vouchsafe to keep up its reputation for fostering the unusual.

The Kill-Off looked like a typical Edinburgh film—an American thriller made independently and cheaply but full of style and a kind of romantic fatalism that made the most of Jim Thompson's pulp novel and its low-life Staten Island setting. So did *Heathers*, another American film made outside Hollywood, which took hold of a well-tried commercial genre and shook it almost to death. This was the teen movie to end all teen movies, written by Daniel Waters (no relation to John) with a fine ear for the latest high-school dialect and an equally developed sense of that hideous caste system which

IN THE PICTURE

determines failure or success. *Heathers* is both funny and incisive and, like *The Kill-Off*, clearly heralds a considerable new talent.

So, without any question, does *Franta*. Allary's adaptation of an Ernst Weiss novel, about a First World War soldier made impotent by his wounds and pitched back into the privations of postwar Germany, is visually stunning in the manner of German Expressionist painting. And his attempt to match the film's emotional content with stylised colour, cinematography and design is often powerfully successful.

Fellow Traveller has an excellent central performance from Ron Silver as a radical Jewish-American writer who leaves his wife and children in Hollywood during the McCarthy era and lands up writing a children's version of *Robin Hood* for British television. But this film à clé is also a highly accomplished piece of work, with an intelligent screenplay by Michael Eaton and direction that refuses to go obvious ways. The chief and memorable merit of *Shirley Valentine* was Pauline Collins' central performance which, of course, has been noted in Willy Russell's successful play. But it isn't always that a stage portrait looks just as honest and audacious on film. We can only be thankful that Gilbert chose her to play the role of the ordinary bored housewife who decides to start living properly, rather than settling for a more obviously bankable star.

On the more radical front, there was the Black Audio Film Collective's *Twilight City*, a portrait of the London being replaced by Thatcherite development. This may have been politically predictable, but it was

made with some polish by Reece Auguste in the poetic freestyle of the award-winning *Handsworth Songs*. There was also Joram ten Brink's *Jacoba*, a slow-burning, highly effective personal testimony to the Christian women who sheltered his Jewish family in the Dutch countryside during the Second World War.

Sisters, produced by Hoffman's usual partner Rick Stevenson for Robert Redford's Wildwood company, has a student arriving in Quebec to spend Christmas with his girl and finding himself among a wildly eccentric and possibly dangerous family. The production design alone would make this fantastical tale worth seeing, but André Gregory as permanently naked father and Lila Kedrova as senile granny are other good reasons. *Where Do We Go From Here?* is the best Bulgarian film for some time, being the clearly allegorical battle of 26 actors to be accepted into drama academy. It's a kind of Middle-European and Kafkaesque version of *Chorus Line*, or perhaps *Fame*. And it is not difficult to prefer it to either, simply for its power of expression and sense of living dangerously.

Finally, David Robinson managed to find the customary Edinburgh sensation, which this year was Jo Mendel's 15-minute *Dick*. This presents us with an endless stream of male appendages (the other side of the coin, as it were, to John Lennon and Yoko Ono's bottoms epic) with amazed or ribald comments on the soundtrack by women. It was only on the fourth or fifth screening that the distributors called a halt. They now have to find out whether the Censor will.

DEREK MALCOLM

Pauline Collins in *Shirley Valentine*.



Tisch SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

Film scholarship demands the finest resources.

We provide them.

The Department of Cinema Studies at the Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, offers graduate students the resources essential to the scholarly study of film. Our M.A. and Ph.D. programs in cinema studies provide:

- Rigorous study of history, criticism, and aesthetics
- Exposure to new methodologies—semiotics, psychoanalysis, structuralism, historiography, and post-structuralism
- Personal viewing/study facilities—flatbeds, analytic projector, and video equipment
- Access to materials—the department's own holdings; rare material from the William Everson Collection, the Museum of Modern Art, and New York City's many cinemas, libraries, and archives.

Our faculty includes Antonia Lant, Annette Michelson, Richard Allen, William K. Everson, Robert Sklar, Robert Stam, and William Simon, chair.

For information, return the coupon or call (212) 998-1600.

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
A PRIVATE UNIVERSITY IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

Tisch School of the Arts
New York University
721 Broadway, 7th Floor
New York, N.Y. 10003

Attn.: Dr. Roberta Cooper

Please send me information on the Cinema Studies Program.

- ☐ Graduate ☐ Junior Year in
☐ Undergraduate ☐ New York
☐ Summer Sessions

Name

Address

City

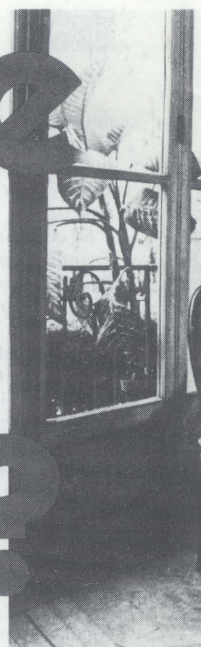
State/Zip Code

Telephone

New York University is an affirmative action/equal opportunity institution.

Sight & Sound Fall '89

where have the foreign films gone?



'Where have all the foreign films gone?' is a question often asked these days, usually by a cinephile 'of a certain age', veteran of many a mammoth British Federation of Film Societies viewing session and London Film Festival in the late 1960s and early 70s, now regarded as something of a Golden Age of 'art cinema' and a far cry from our own starved and straitened times. But is it as simple as that? Indeed, is it like that at all?

The first thing that anyone researching film distribution and exhibition discovers is the shortage of official statistics. Since the last Films Act, new releases no longer have to be registered with the Department of Trade and Industry. This, however, was never a particularly useful source of information in the first place, since the only distinction it seemed to recognise was between British and non-British product. In other words, it failed to distinguish between imports from Hollywood and from anywhere else in the world. Also, some films seem to have escaped registration altogether.

Secondly, there is the British Board of Film Classification (né Censors). Its figures, however, reflect only the number of films submitted to it each year, as opposed to the number of films actually released in any one year. And again, not all films released in Britain pass through the BBFC. In the 1960s and early 70s the Greater London Council used to allow the showing in London of certain films banned by the censor from wider consumption; and now, as then, some cinema clubs show films which have not been submitted to the BBFC (as often as not for reasons of cost).

In fact, the most reliable guide to the number of films released annually in the UK is probably the *Monthly Film Bulletin*. Its very completeness, however, poses certain problems for anybody investigating the growth or decline of the 'art cinema' over the last twenty or so years. Thus if one simply counts up the numbers of non-British,

JULIAN PETLEY

non-Hollywood films, one finds the tally swelled in the 60s by numerous peplums, in the 70s by martial arts films and Italian Westerns, and in every decade by hordes of tawdry sex films.

The answer, then, is to limit the count to subtitled films. Even so there are problems, since a few sex films still slip into the net, and one misses certain interesting dubbed films or 'English-language versions'. For example, no one seriously interested in European cinema would in 1976 have sought out *Les Enjambées* (*Cat Dance of Sex*) or attempted to canonise its director Jeanne Chaix, but in 1970 they might well have gone to see the non-subtitled *L'Assoluto Naturale* (Bolognini) and *La Prisonnière* (Clouzot). In the following analyses, therefore, I have excluded subtitled sex films and included dubbed films and 'English-language versions' which are clearly aimed at an 'art house' audience. Such a method inevitably involves subjective factors, but at least it has the merit of consistency and allows one to compare like with like. And in the absence of adequate official statistics it is probably the most accurate measure available.

What the chart on the next page shows is that while the number of releases *as a whole* has declined, the proportion of art house films has slightly increased, while since 1970 the numbers have remained fairly static. On the other hand, of course, it must be remembered that the range of *potential* imports has risen massively, not least because of the development of the cinema in various non-Western countries, so we are still seeing only tiny samples of the world's cinemas in this country.

Meanwhile, what has happened to the 'art house' sector in London? Has it

expanded or contracted? Looking at issues of *Time Out* from 1970 (itself rather a curious experience), it becomes clear that cinemas which regularly showed foreign films were the three Academies, the Berkeley, the Cameo-Poly, the Cinecenta (in its very early days), the Continentale, the Gala Royal, the Curzon, the ICA, various Classics, the Golders Green Ionic, the Paris Pullman, the Screen on the Green, the Prince Charles, the Times at Baker Street, the Venus at Kentish Town and the Hampstead Everyman. Repertory cinemas and clubs included the Electric, the Co-Op, the National Film Theatre and the New Cinema Club.

Today the cinemas at which foreign films can be found (although by no means all the time) are the Lumière, the two Renoirs, the Chelsea, the Camden Plaza, the four-screen Premiere Centre, the two Cannon screens at Baker Street, the Prince Charles, both the ICA cinemas, the Screens on the Hill, Green and Baker Street (two), the three Curzons, the Minema, the two screens at the Metro and the Gate. Repertory cinemas (some of which also include first-runs from time to time) are the Everyman, the National Film Theatre, the Phoenix at East Finchley, the Riverside, the Scala, the Ritz and the Rio. The New Cinema Club ceased to exist some time ago, but the Co-Op still runs an imaginative programme of avant-garde and experimental films from around the world and from different periods of the cinema's history.

The biggest change from the early 70s in the field of exhibition is, undoubtedly, the growth of the repertory area (and, of course, the sad demise of the much-missed Electric). But repertory programmes, even the most imaginative ones, don't really increase the number of films in distribution since they rely on films which are already in circulation and have had their first run. The other difference, though not really a very pronounced one, is that subtitled films do now occasionally find their way



out of the traditional art houses. At the time of writing *Amsterdamned* is showing at the Tottenham Court Road and Piccadilly Cannons, and *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* is also at the Cannon Piccadilly.

Without underestimating the seriousness of the loss of the Academy cinemas, it does seem that Londoners, at least, still have a relatively wide choice of venues showing serious foreign films; though it needs to be stressed that virtually no cinema now shows *only* foreign films, and that the habit of showing the same film simultaneously at two or more cinemas puts space for new films at a premium.

The vast majority of subtitled movies are distributed by independent companies. Altogether there are 46, of which 15 have a consistent policy of releasing subtitled films. The majors (UIP, Fox, Warners, Columbia Tri-Star, Pathé [Cannon], Rank) rarely touch this kind of film, though Pathé has a separate 'Classics Division' managed by Kenneth Rive, incorporating his Gala Films catalogue.

Of the distribution companies handling subtitled films, seven have their own cinemas, with a total of 23 screens. These are Artificial Eye, Pathé, Electric Pictures, the ICA, Mainline, the Other Cinema and Recorded Releasing. Clearly, these distributors have something of an edge over their rivals, in that they can maximise the returns on their films by ensuring the longest possible runs—a privilege often denied the rest. Having paid an advance to the producer, the distributor has to get the film on to the

Left: *India Song*. Andi Engel showed the Duras film in 1977, but couldn't risk it like today.
Right: *Manon des Sources*, benefiting from the 'Jean de Florette syndrome'.

screen as soon as possible; he cannot hang around looking for a sympathetic exhibitor because of worries about the interest rate on his advance investment. So the distributor often has to make do with a fast and unsatisfactory playdate in an over-supplied and cutthroat marketplace.

Specialist distributors hope to go into profit (if at all) on the strength of the London run. If a film flops in London it is unlikely to succeed in the 40 Regional Film Theatres—if indeed it gets there. As Tony Kirkhope of the Other Cinema commented: 'There seems to have been a shift in RFT policy. The foreign product they show is a distillation of the more commercially successful art house movies in London. They run them for very short periods of time, and they're not bothered about films which haven't entirely succeeded. There's not the commitment to this area of cinema that there used to be, and they tend to offset the more "difficult" films with ones that could easily be at a Cannon round the corner. Films to which you'd expect them to be committed, like those by Sembène for example, seem to be anathema—unless they have taken a lot in the West End.'

It is rare to strike more than four prints initially, two being a more usual number. This can create problems, since regional cinemas depend for their audiences on playing titles as soon as pos-

sible after the publicity generated by their London openings. Unexpectedly successful films have sometimes had to be pulled from their London runs to fulfil bookings in the regions.

It is difficult to establish the average weekly admissions to London's independent cinemas, since not all of them regularly declare their returns in *Screen International*. A figure of around 40,000, however, seems reasonable. (Again, it needs to be borne in mind that not all these cinemas will be playing foreign-language films.) A really major film like *Betty Blue* or *Subway* opening at the most popular independent cinemas might expect to attract 15-20,000 in its first week, but such hits are rare. Total annual audience figures for independent films of all kinds (including British and non-mainstream American product) probably account for about 5 per cent of the market as a whole. If one extracts the subtitled films from this figure, the total for them is perhaps nearer one per cent.

Few working in the field seem to find much cause for cheerfulness in the present situation. The main complaints of distributors and exhibitors centre on rising costs (including the prices being asked by producers), audiences' general lack of adventurousness, the depressing state of much of what passes for film criticism and, for those distributors not fortunate enough to have their own cinemas, the difficulty of finding theatres that will take their product and treat it with the care it deserves. The only optimistic note on which most distributors and/or exhibitors agree concerns BBC2's renewal of interest in foreign-language cinema since the arrival of Alan Yentob, complementing Channel 4's useful work in this area.

Andi Engel of Artificial Eye is particularly critical of contemporary audience taste: 'The problem is not really to do with the actual number of films imported, but that those which *are* imported don't seem to be reaching

FOREIGN FILM RELEASES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

	Total releases	Subtitled	Dubbed, etc	%
1965	346	32	11	12.4
1970	346	42	17	17
1975	405	38	15	13.1
1980	291	50	4	18.6
1985	292	55	3	19.9
1988	251	39	7	18.3

audiences. When we started, we could bring in a film like Marguerite Duras' *India Song* and people would come to see it—not in vast numbers, I admit, but enough to cover our costs. If we showed a Duras film now, I'm convinced that many fewer people would come, and in the meantime our costs—prints, salaries, advertising, rates, etc.—have shot up. People seem to have lost their curiosity about foreign films. Unless a film is really hyped by the press, what I call the *Jean de Florette* syndrome, they just don't want to know.'

At the time of our conversation, Artificial Eye were smarting about the poor attendances for Angelopoulos' *Landscape in the Mist*—admittedly not helped by the very un-English summer and various transport strikes. As Andi Engel admitted with refreshing candour, audience figures being the film industry's equivalent of Official Secrets: '*Landscape* hasn't been getting more than 1,000 people a week, and that doesn't even cover the cinema overheads, let alone the cost of prints and advertising. [The average cost for a 35mm print is around £2,000, excluding subtitling and censor's fees.] Next time we see an Angelopoulos film that we like, we will have to ask ourselves how strong is our bank balance, and how much we can afford to lose.'

For a film to count as a financial success, Engel estimates that it needs to attract at least 3,000 people a week for a six-week run. It may then go out to the RFTS, though he sets little store by this source of revenue. It has to be said, however, that other sources have estimated that a successful film may attract a total audience of around 100,000 in a year or so in the RFTS, clocking up a net return to the distributor of about £30,000.

Andi Engel is particularly scathing about the effects of what he sees as a critical bias towards Hollywood, perhaps encouraged by the way film studies have developed over the last twenty years. This is obviously most apparent in the popular press, though it also finds its critical and academic echo in other quarters. 'The term "art cinema" has become a dirty word to some people, something to be dismissed as bourgeois rubbish. Anything which is not genre cinema must be automatically bad—either it's entertaining or it's boring, there's nothing in between. It is not so much that people aren't interested in cinema, or prepared to take it seriously; it's that they are only interested in certain *kinds* of cinema and lack any cinematic curiosity. It's like going into a library and deciding you will only ever look at one part of it. It doesn't mean that you can't read; it means that you are not prepared to consider everything there is on offer, even out of curiosity. I find that attitude frightening.'

Engel's points about audiences are echoed by Joe d'Morais of Blue Dolphin, who cites as examples the absence from distribution in this country of any films by Yannick Bellon, the poor performances of *Pelle the Conqueror* and *La*

Petite Voleuse and the difficulty in pushing new talents such as Sam Pillsbury (*The Scarecrow*) and Ben Verbong (*The Girl With Red Hair*). At the same time, he feels there is not that much happening in European cinema at present. 'I think that at the moment the most interesting films are coming from the Third World. I liked *Yeelen* very much, and when I first saw *La Vie est*

Belle it brightened me up a lot and did for me what some European cinema did in the 60s. The best ideas at the moment seem to be away from Britain, the USA and Europe. I'm looking more and more towards Africa and India, and also New Zealand with films like *Bad Taste* and *The Navigator*.'

While it is obviously crucial to extend the notion of the 'foreign' film beyond

Some critics' choices of films not yet in British distribution.

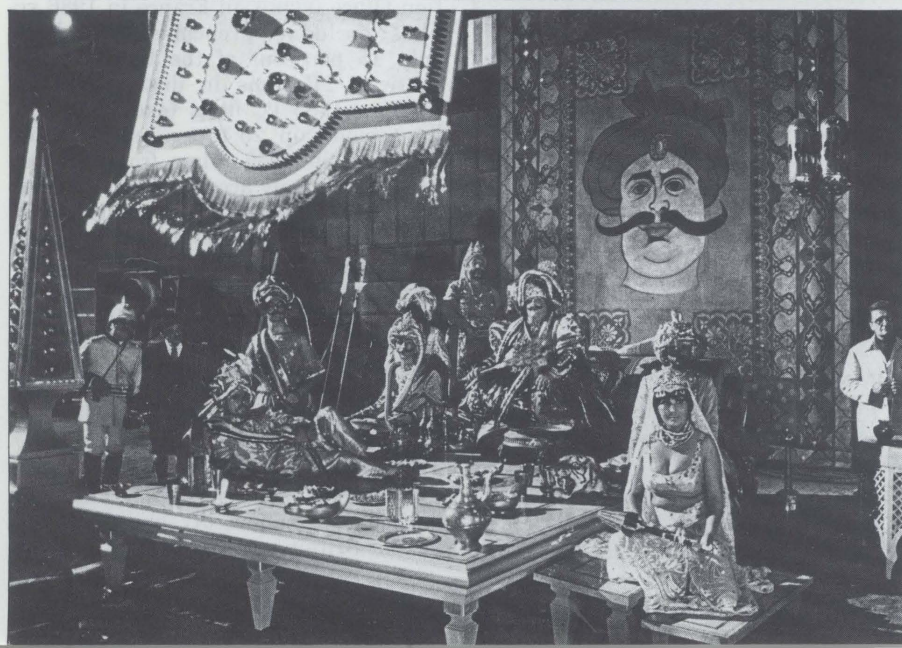
Top to bottom: *Whooping Cough* (Gardos), *No End* (Morita), *Max, Mon Amour* (Oshima).



the boundaries of Europe, there still remain the problems of audience conservatism and critical short-sightedness. Joe d'Morais is as scathing as Andi Engel. 'Audiences go by hype now, but one has to have a lot of money and time to get that kind of massive coverage. We spend a great deal of time trying to get our films into as many publications as possible. If you don't do that, you

might as well forget the whole thing. We don't have an audience any more that seeks things out—they have to be told what to see and have it shoved under their noses the whole time. Half the films by lesser known directors which opened in the 60s wouldn't have a chance now. I've always given audiences the benefit of the doubt, but really it gets harder and harder.'

More neglected titles. Top to bottom: *Une Chambre en Ville* (Demy), *Taipei Story* (Yang), *L'Intervista* (Fellini).



On criticism, we discuss the paradox that there are now more pages than ever in newspapers and magazines devoted to cinema, but less in the way of substantial criticism and informed analysis. As Derek Malcolm pointed out at last year's FIPRESCI symposium: 'There is certainly a great deal wrong with film criticism today and the papers are as much to blame as the critics. At present they are obsessed with star interviews, listings, gobbets of pre-digested information, two lines on "the three best films at the London Film Festival". The last thing we ever get is any analysis of the films themselves. And some weeks there are 12 new releases which have to be dealt with in about 1,200 words. Analysis is out of the question.'

While acknowledging the efforts of the critics in the 'quality' press, d'Morais reserves his wrath for 'the new breed of critic who writes for *Sky* or some of the new monthly glossies. I've actually been told by a few of them that they don't like watching subtitled pictures. For many of them, cinema doesn't seem to exist before 1970, so their writing lacks any kind of perspective. One even wrote that *Salaam Bombay* was the first film to have been made on the streets of India.

'I used to run a booking agency for film societies and it was depressing to get some of their lists, especially for universities. In my film society days you used to put down titles that you *couldn't* see at the cinema, and the more obscure the better. Now, even if people do book *Subway*, they insist on the dubbed version. And these are the people who are now writing for *Sky* and the like.' The BFFS's Peter Cargin backs him up: 'Some student societies are simply philistine organisations out to make money for Rag Week. All they want to show is the latest James Bond or *Star Wars*. And the worst offenders aren't above showing pirated video prints.'

D'Morais is not an exhibitor. He has to place the films he distributes in other people's cinemas, and thus to some extent is at the exhibitor's mercy. This is not always a happy position when a reasonably successful British or European film may be pulled out of its run to make way for a Hollywood blanket release movie. D'Morais cites Didier Grousset's *Kamikaze* as a film which was taken off by Cannon before its time, and also *Crack in the Mirror*, which was moved from one cinema to another, thereby breaking its run, in order to make way for one of the 150 prints of *Sing*, a sort of sub-*Dirty Dancing*, which sank without trace after a week. 'Everyone knows what clout the major distributors have, but I really don't think they should put Rank and Cannon under such pressure. In the long term, it damages us all, because we'll start losing the audience again. In 1989 no film should be playing to empty houses. It's pointless and it's no good for anybody.'

D'Morais also argues that some of the prices asked for European films are

simply too high, some of the biggest offenders being the French. 'It took ages to get *Kamikaze* because they were asking unbelievable prices, but I kept on going back until it came down to a quarter of what they originally wanted. Unlike the Germans, the French just don't seem to want to do deals. There have been five or six films from France that I and others would have liked to buy, but they have never opened here because nobody, quite rightly, has been prepared to pay those prices.' His words are echoed by Contemporary's Charles Cooper: 'At Cannes this year some people were asking for \$100,000 for theatrical rights alone. It's better to come back with nothing than pay too much, see the film flop and have your business go under. With interest rates as they are today, you just can't afford large debts. If you put a foot wrong now you can go out of business very quickly and very easily.'

Kenneth Rive agrees: 'Some of the prices being asked today are frankly unrealistic. Personally, I think one should try to buy films before they are shown at festivals. Once a film is in a festival, and particularly if they think it's in the running for a prize, producers tend to get cocky and start thinking in terms of telephone numbers.' On the other hand, of course, if one waits too long for prices to come down, the film may lose its topicality, people forget the festival reports, the prizes, the interviews.

Rive also tends to agree with d'Morais that one reason why we may be seeing less European cinema today is that much of it simply isn't very good: 'The French are certainly making a lot of movies, but many of them are simply unplayable rubbish. I think the public over here gets to see the best, such as *Le Cop*, *La Balance*, *La Lectrice*, *Camille Claudel*, *Sous le Soleil de Satan*, *La Petite Voleuse*. As for the Italian cinema, much of the domestic product is just not suitable for British audiences, and the more specialised films have suffered a severe drop in quality.'

As mentioned earlier, the one point about which distributors and exhibitors feel some degree of optimism concerns the continuing role of Channel 4, and the renaissance of BBC2, as buyers and exhibitors of foreign films. It might be thought that the television screening of movies only further dissuades people from going out to see them in the cinema. This does not turn out to be the case, however, and all the distributors to whom I spoke stressed the importance of having television as well as theatrical rights.

According to Kenneth Rive: 'I would never buy a film today unless I could buy all the rights. I buy most of my films in conjunction with the BBC, and it's a very happy relationship.' And similarly Joe d'Morais: 'Television rights are absolutely vital. I wouldn't be interested in taking on a film without them. What you get from selling the film to tv goes a little way towards covering you if the film doesn't do any-

thing theatrically.' Charles Cooper adds: 'Now it's a bit more competitive, one does hope to get a fairer price for the tv rights. After all, the theatrical distributor/exhibitor gets about 30p from each paying member of the cinema audience, while on tv it's less than one tenth of a penny per head.'

It is clear that without Channel 4 and BBC2 we would be seeing even fewer foreign films on our cinema screens, and certainly with its recent purchases at Ouagadougou (of which some will open theatrically) the BBC is set to play a major role in the increasing and wholly welcome interest in African cinema. What television gets out of this arrangement, of course, is publicity for the films it has bought.

As everybody knows, films (even British ones) which are shown only on television are treated largely as ephemeral product. Only films shown in cinemas stand much chance of establishing any kind of identity in print and entering the written film culture. Though the sceptical might say that the

specialist distributor/exhibitor is simply acting as an unpaid publicist for television... And, as Derek Malcolm points out: 'If people will now show foreign films only if tv is interested in them, then the real arbiters of what we see on our cinema screens are the people in charge of film buying at Channel 4 and BBC2. And they, of course, are thinking more about their audience ratings than about the state of specialised exhibition.'

As part of this survey, I asked several critics to list some individual films or directors which they felt had been neglected during the 1980s. The results certainly show a number of perceived gaps. And if one goes back through the last five London Film Festivals, there are a remarkable number of films by well-known directors which have failed to find distribution. Even if one confines the list to European directors and excludes films which have been shown on television, it still includes work by Kluge, Rivette, Costa-Gavras, Wajda, von Trotta and Sautet.

It may well be that the majority of these films have not been picked up because they simply are not economic propositions. Distributors and exhibitors are in the business of business, not of cinematic charity. On the other hand, comments by Joe d'Morais and Andi Engel suggest that twenty years ago a film's chances of release were higher, given that audience tastes were more adventurous and distributors and exhibitors were in a better economic position to offset the less popular films against the art-house hits. It could also be pointed out that the LFF now shows more non-English language films than ever, reflecting the growth of cinema across the world, and that it would be impossible for a market which appears to be unable to support the release of more than one subtitled film a week, on average, to take more than a tiny fraction. Hard choices have to be made, and even potentially popular films by well-known directors may fall by the wayside.

According to a report recently published by the European Film Distribution Office (EFDO), in France in 1986 EC films (excluding French) accounted for only 15 per cent of the total market share of all films in distribution; in Italy in 1985 EC films (excluding Italian) made up 25.4 per cent; and in Germany in 1986, films from France, Britain and Italy accounted for 12.1 per cent. Meanwhile, in his presentation of the EFDO programme at the NFT last May, Dieter Kosslick came up with the surprising statistic that only 20 per cent of films produced in the EC are shown outside their country of origin. EFDO was set up under the MEDIA 92 umbrella to assist the distribution of low-budget films in the European Community. The fact that the initiative is necessary indicates that the problems outlined in this article are European and not limited to a supposedly philistine and insular Britain. ■

CRITICS' CHOICES Films not in distribution in Britain

GEOFF ANDREW

Une Chambre en Ville (Demy, 1982)
Mortelle Randonnée (Miller, 1983)
Taipei Story (Yang, 1985)
Tokyo-Ga (Wenders, 1985)
Max, Mon Amour (Oshima, 1986)
Dust in the Wind (Hou Xiaoxian, 1987)
Last Day of Winter (Wu Ziniu, 1987)
La Passion Béatrice (Tavernier, 1987)

PETER CARGIN

The Unapproachable (Zanussi, 1982)
Searchers in the Desert (Khemir, 1984)
Hero of the Year (Falk, 1986)
The Microscope (Thome, 1986)
Blind Chance (Kieslowski, 1987)
L'Intervista (Fellini, 1987)
Whooping Cough (Gardos, 1987)
Actress (Kuhn, 1988)
Katinka (Von Sydow, 1988)

RICHARD COMBS

Les Fantômes du Chapelier (Chabrol, 1982)
Max, Mon Amour (Oshima, 1986)
Une Affaire des Femmes (Chabrol, 1988)
Films by Bellocchio.

PHILIP FRENCH

Directors: Deray, Widerberg, Sjöman, Corneau, Jessua and Johan Bergstrahler.
Le Tartuffe (Depardieu, 1984)
Train d'Enfer (Hanin, 1985)

JOHN GILLET

Market Place (Benegal, 1983)
Tangos, the Exile of Gardel (Solanas, 1985)
And Then (Morita, 1985)
Max, Mon Amour (Oshima, 1986)
A Woman to be Hanged (Sabuncu, 1987)
A Story of the Wind (Ivens/Loridan, 1988)
Katinka (Von Sydow, 1988)
The Spell (Farhang, 1988)

• THE EYES OF • Canada

• THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD AT FIFTY • GERALD PRATLEY •



The National Film Board's headquarters in Montreal.

'The National Film Board will be the eyes of Canada. It will, through a national use of cinema, see Canada and see it whole, its people and its purposes.'—JOHN GRIERSON

But when Grierson left the Board in 1945, his term of office having expired, and with his sense of 'people and purpose' deeply ingrained in his loyal staff and in the films they had made, the destroyers, in the form of private enterprise and civil servants, began chipping away at the foundations which Grierson had so courageously laid.

In the summer of 1946, a young man fresh from the country came to Ottawa, to the old sawmill where the Board worked, and went to see the personnel manager. He wanted to make films, to work his way up from the bottom to become a director—the only way in those years before film schools were established. Furthermore, had not Grierson said, many times, that the Board also had a responsibility to train new workers to create a body of filmmakers for Canada?

This applicant was but one of many who came to the Board, all to receive the same now much-quoted answer from the manager: 'My dear young man, I may not have a job here myself next week, so how can I give you one?'

And indeed, neither she nor many other staff members had a job in the nervous months which followed, as the government cut its allocations to the Board and did its best, mainly to pacify Hollywood companies—although the NFB was no rival to them—to disband it altogether. Influential voices were raised in support of the Board, and it survived; but barely.

The point to this story is that after fifty years—the Board having been established by Parliament on 2 May 1939—it is still fighting the same battles for survival as it did at the end of the Second World War. For the NFB, its very existence has been one of almost continual crisis to the extent that this has become the normal way of life.

And now, in its fiftieth year, the Board's situation is more desperate than ever, in the face of a Conservative government determined in its new budgetary year to privatise as many Crown Corporations and government agencies as it possibly can. The NFB is unlikely to be sold. Who would buy its studios and buildings in Montreal and take on its staff? Certainly not the private enterprise practitioners who would deny the right of the NFB to exist. The NFB would simply be disbanded—wiped out by the elimination of its funding.

But these fears are being pushed into the background, papered over and little mentioned during this great year of the 50th anniversary celebrations. Although the Board has no permanent Commissioner (François Macerola having given up early and taken a higher paying job in the private sector), it is being well managed by his former deputy, Joan Pennefather. While she continues to look on the bright side until December, the thought of what the aftermath of the celebrations may bring is cause for concern.

In the meantime, however, the Board is receiving the kind of media attention it has dreamed about for the last half-century. Newspapers and magazines, which could never be bothered to review its short films and seldom its feature-length ones, are filled with stories about its fifty years of history and achievements, including the inevitable and knowing references to the uncertain future. Television channels from the CBC down to the smallest stations in the smallest towns and cities are showing all manner of NFB films, which most of them have resolutely refused to do since the television service was introduced in 1952. The Board itself, always accused of not making its work known to the public, has produced a flood of

paperwork in which it sometimes overstates its cause; and is forced hypocritically, as is so often the case with government departments, to praise its master for all it had done while expecting every minute to receive another beating.

As with all joyful parties, however, doubts and uncertainties are put aside. While audiences at home are being made aware of the Board's work in a volume never before seen at one time, we are told by the NFB that throughout this year television audiences in more than forty countries will have the opportunity of seeing in excess of 550 classic films broadcast by their networks and stations.

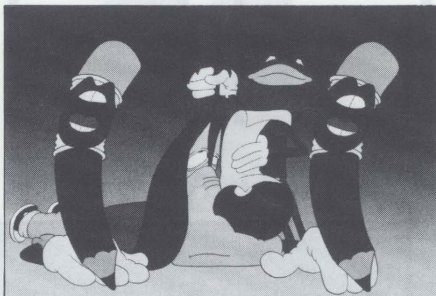
The planners have also done well with retrospectives: the Museum of Modern Art in New York with five 21-hour programmes; the American Film Institute in Los Angeles held six two-hour lectures with NFB film-makers and their work; the Centre Culturel Canadien de Paris did a two-week showing at Cinéma l'Entrepot; and the Swedish and British Film Institutes are mounting seasons.

The festival circuit is filled with tributes: Brussels, Berlin, Bristol, Montreal, Toronto, London, Santa Barbara, San Francisco, Cannes, Oslo, Annecy, Lisbon, Melbourne, Edinburgh, and more. An Honorary Academy Award was presented to the Board, and another came from the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television; Canada Post is issuing a commemorative stamp; and the Board itself is naming its second building in Montreal (the first is named in honour of Grierson) after Norman McLaren, Canada's best-known animator, who died in 1987. Nearly all the NFB's feature-length films will be shown on Channel 4 in the United Kingdom.

In Montreal, this year's programming at the Palais de la Civilisation is devoted exclusively to the cinema. The third part, entitled 'Cités-Cinés', is

being produced with the NFB as part of the celebrations. Cités-Cinés, a cinema exposition, was created in Paris, where last year it drew 450,000 visitors in less than three months.

Probably the most ambitious event organised by the Board, also from Montreal, is the festival entitled 'Salute to the Documentary', consisting of three parts: the International Symposium, the International Documentary Film Week



Get a Job.

(both in Montreal) and the National Dimension, a programme to tour Canada. Subjects discussed and illustrated ranged over concepts of changing audiences, the effect of TV on the documentary, the ubiquitous theme of women's perspectives, images of the Third World and the never-ending preoccupation with marketing.

For the first time since its inception in 1957, UNIATEC (the International Union of Technical Cinematograph Associations) is holding its congress in Montreal in October. Many observers in Toronto, noting the preponderance of events, celebrations and 'open houses' being held, in French, in Montreal, are recalling the opposition raised in 1956 when the Government moved the Board from Ottawa (considered a neutral city between Toronto and Montreal) to Montreal. It was argued then that in time the Board would become more of a Québécois establishment (with federal funding) than a Canadian one. Aware of this dissatisfaction, the Board opened

regional centres; but this move had the unexpected effect of isolating the NFB in Montreal even further from the rest of the country—and strengthening its French character.

Doing their best for the Board in the rest of the country are such organisations as the Ontario Film Theatre, Harbourfront, the Royal Ontario Museum (in Toronto), the Pacific Cinémathèque (Vancouver), the Atlantic Film Makers Co-operative in Halifax, and National Film Theatres and repertory houses elsewhere, all holding massive programmes ranging from Canadian award-winning NFB films through the years to Franco-Ontarian films of the present.

While the past is being rediscovered, and much of it is extremely good, with such titles as *Drug Addict* (1948), *Farewell to Oak Street* (slum clearance;

Left to right:
Sitting in Limbo; Ikwe;
Mile Zero; No Address.

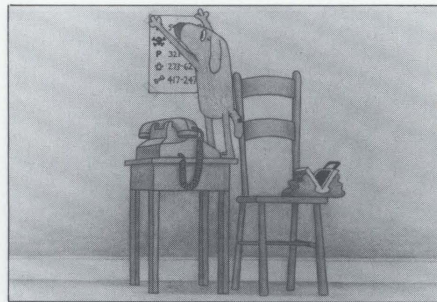


1953), *The Dresden Story* (racial discrimination; 1954), *Lonely Boy* (Paul Anka; 1961), *Corral* (1954), *The Things I Cannot Change* (family poverty; 1966), a flood of new films has arrived on the scene, with news of others in production.

It has always been difficult keeping up with NFB films because most of them are short subjects (and shorts are seldom reviewed in the mass media) and because there are so many of them (some 17,000 since Grierson started it all). But to judge from those recently released and those which are forthcoming, the idealism of the Board during the time of John Grierson remains strong. This is most apparent among works such as Beverly Shaffer's *To a Safer Place* (incest); Gil Cardinal's *Foster Child* (the treatment of native Indians), also the themes of Alanis Obomsawin's *Poundmaker's Lodge*, *A Healing Place* and *No Address*; Jacques Godbout's *Alias Will James*; Michel Regnier's *Sucre Noir*; Patricia Watson's *The Legacy of Mary McKewan*; Bonnie Sher Klein's *Mile Zero* (nuclear warfare); Dorothy Henault's *Firewords*; Les Drew's *Every Dog's Guide to Complete Home Safety*. And there are the major series: Norma Bailey's four-part *Daughters of the Country*; the sequel to Gwyn Dyer's War series, entitled *Defence of Canada*; *At the Wheel*, designed to improve driving habits; Donald Brittain's *The King Chronicle*, on the life of the former prime minister Mackenzie King; *Reckoning—The Political Economy in Canada*, and the *Canadian Authors* series (Mordecai Richler, Brian Moore, Irving Layton and others).

The Board has also made several likeable feature-length films during recent years. Though none has reached the level of Claude Jutra's *My Uncle Antoine* (1971), we can well be pleased with John Smith's *Sitting in Limbo* (1986) and *Train of Dreams* (1987) and Giles Walker's *90 Days* (1985), with several others, all made on budgets the

NFB could afford. But the Board, caught up in the co-production mania and eager to be seen to serve the private sector, has put money it could have spent elsewhere into commercial features in which, good or indifferent, it has lost its identity and also receives little credit for the money it has invested; nor, indeed, any financial return on most of them. Among the better known and successful are *Unfinished*



Every Dog's Guide to Complete Home Safety.

Business, The Decline of the American Empire, Night Zoo, Jesus of Montreal; but few think of these in relation to the Film Board.

There is considerable surprise that the Board would use its limited finances to make the latest Imax film in China. *Qin Shihuang, the First Emperor* is seen as an attempt to cash in on the success of Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor*, and will have little circulation in the world given the limited number of Imax installations. Furthermore, the film has no connection with Canada and seems an indulgence the Board cannot afford. Its reason for being is to provide a long-running attraction for Ottawa's new Museum of Civilisation. We are promised 'a cast of thousands, a dazzling display of costumes and sets, a massive production,' and 'for the first time the Chinese have allowed film crews to shoot on the excavation site of Qin's tomb.'

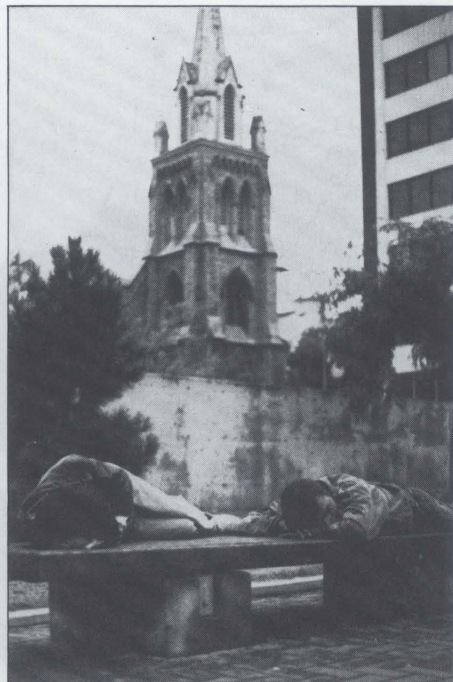
While there may be good reasons to balance the serious subject-matter of

the present anniversary films—Metis women, foster-care, alcohol, ageing, drugs, drunk-driving, home safety, the homeless, disarmament, social and political histories, racism, medical practices, crime in the streets and the mounting concern over the environment—with something colourful, entertaining and important in the epic sense, there are more than enough subjects in Canada to fill this need, long neglected by the Board's roving cameras. A good example would be chapters from Canada's unknown history, which private television is about to present in one-minute 'spots' as fillers between programmes and commercials. This is a telling indication of how important Canadian history is to film-makers, writers and broadcasters.

The animation studios of the Board, started by Norman McLaren (his 1952 film *Neighbours* is probably the most often projected film in the anniversary programme—it is timeless), are represented by *George and Rosemary, The Cat Came Back, The Big Snit, The Phoenix, Thunderbird, No Problem, Strings, The Dingles* and others, with five in competition at Annecy.

This widespread recognition being given to the Board in its anniversary year is encouraging and impressive. With more than 500 new and older films in circulation on television, pay tv, speciality and educational channels, in film theatres and specialised cinemas (but not on the two main Canadian circuits, Famous Players and Cineplex Odeon), in schools and museums, churches and group meetings, there cannot, it would seem, be many Canadians who are not aware of the Board and its films. Yet its detractors claim that without box-office figures to measure the number of people who see NFB films, the totals given by the Board (over ten million a year) are greatly exaggerated.

In this respect, the Board is not



encouraged when told that a survey it commissioned revealed that only 19 per cent of the public questioned was 'quite familiar' with the Board and its films, with another 66 per cent 'a little familiar'. The agency doing the research added that despite its fifty years of non-stop activity, the public has only a 'vague understanding of the Board and its functions.' Even among those who said they were aware of the Board, few could remember having seen an NFB film or could give any titles. But since the majority of Canadians believe in government agencies for the arts, few of those questioned called for the abolition of the Board. Most considered that whatever it was doing, it must be doing it well to have lasted for fifty years. But how much should be believed from surveys of any kind?

It has always been difficult for the Board to reach audiences for its films on general subjects, those which might appeal to a wide public as opposed to teaching or instructional films for special groups and those which support certain causes. The cinemas never wanted them, and today in North America it is no longer the practice to show anything with feature films other than trailers. The work of the NFB would find its largest audiences over the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) network if the CBC would only co-operate with it. But in this respect the CBC has behaved in a consistently shameful manner since it began its television service. It has always considered itself better than the Board. Once modelled on the BBC as a public broadcasting service, it long ago changed to the American system, sold itself to advertisers, became obsessed with ratings, and would rather spend money on American programmes (which audiences can see on the many US channels beamed into Canada) than co-operate with the NFB.

The CBC costs the taxpayers some \$900 million a year; it is the world's

only subsidised commercial network, looking for the most part no different from CBS, ABC or NBC. Yet year after year it accepts only a very few of the NFB's programmes, and then only after keeping the Board waiting for many months while those responsible for programme decisions make up their minds. Their reasons for rejecting so much of the Board's work are weak indeed. True, some NFB officials can be



The Dingles.

dull and difficult to deal with, but then so are many at CBC; this is no excuse for the CBC to ignore the enormous reservoir of good films produced annually by the Board.

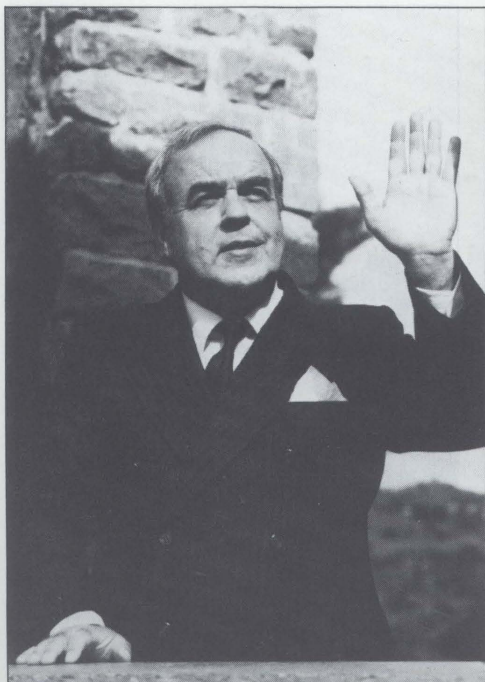
After years of this treatment at the hands of the CBC, the NFB spent more than \$800,000 preparing presentations for the CRTC (which grants licences for radio, TV and cable) in its application for a licence for one of two speciality channels which became available on cable. It would have programmed its films and other Canadian productions on a regular, every-day basis. Not surprisingly, knowing the CRTC's attitude, the Board was turned down in favour of private operators whose programming is mainly American. The NFB, with its budget of \$74 million, has always given the public far better value for its money than the CBC is capable of doing—and it should be remembered that it must work in English and French and that the cost of bilingualism is high in every aspect of what it does. With both agen-

cies (CBC is a Crown Corporation, the NFB a government department) facing more budget cuts, the two should work together at all times. But the CBC's answer to financial problems is to sell more commercials.

Away from television, the Board has made great progress in the video market. Its films are not to be found in every video shop (their mainstay comes from Hollywood) but at the Board's regional centres and in libraries. While the Board still makes its films on 16mm, the market for them and the showing of 16mm everywhere has passed away in favour of video projection. Now, almost every film made by the Board is available on video cassette.

Colin Low, the last of the original Grierson group of film-makers still working at the Board, looks upon the present uncertainties with a calmness which comes from years of living with the ups-and-downs of the NFB. 'I'm surprised,' he said, 'that the Board and I have survived, and that we still both want it to work. I think it will survive, and if it doesn't, it will be reinvented.' Low, who came from the spacious plains of Alberta when he was 18 to join Norman McLaren as an animator, has participated in every form of production at the Board: as artist, animator, cameraman, director, administrator; as teacher and theorist; and throughout the years a fiercely loyal supporter of the principle of documentary film-making financed by the public sector.

The Board's archives, for instance, contain what is probably one of the best histories of a country ever recorded on documentary film. It would be difficult to find in the US, long considered the world's leading film producer, a similar history in documentary form. A history of our kind can transform the future, and I think it's essential to our modern society. We have made hundreds of

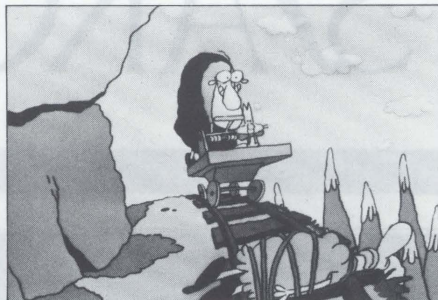


films over the past fifty years which anticipated the future, from ecological disasters to travel in space.'

Low, who made the impressive *Transitions* for Vancouver's Expo in 1986 (the first Imax 3-D film) is now working on an Omnimax 3-D for the Board. Within the 'anticipating the future' aspect of the Board's work, he recalls that Norman McLaren made the first 3-D film in Canada, *Around Is Around*, at the NFB in 1951 for the Festival of Britain. 'It really predicated what was going to happen some twenty years later, that is, the advent of the computer image. Our interest now is in Imax 3-D, which is about as pictorial as it is possible to be. By using Omnimax and 3-D in a dome, an object can pass by your face in 3-D and with computer "imaging" the effect is simply stunning. The camera occupies no space in space—and this is stunning too, in terms of effects. You can derive any kinetic experience; you can go through objects. A body 30-feet tall on the screen becomes 5 foot 4 inches in space, and you can reach out and touch it. The tactile sense is so strong that when something passes by the back of your neck, you can feel it. We are still working on ways to synchronise the

dialogue, and when we find it, audiences will see a totally new experience in cinema.'

It is easy for the commercial sector in Canada consumed by the Hollywood North mentality—which sees the servicing of American companies and the making of pseudo-American international films as being the strength of the 'industry'—to dismiss the Board as irrelevant, but who among them is to



The Cat Came Back.

carry out technical experiments such as this? Ever since Grierson found ways of improvising technical services during wartime, the Board has excelled in technical advances which have passed into general usage with little praise being given for them.

From where would commercial producers raise the money to make films on wide-ranging social issues, which is the hallmark of the Board? Do they expect government departments to hire them? The fact is that the majority of subjects tackled by the Board's film-makers are initiated by them, not by government departments. It is easy, too, for the private sector, which has done little to give Canada a screen presence and identity, to call for the end of the Board and to forget that it is home to almost every young independent film-maker in Quebec and the other provinces who has decided to start life with a camera.

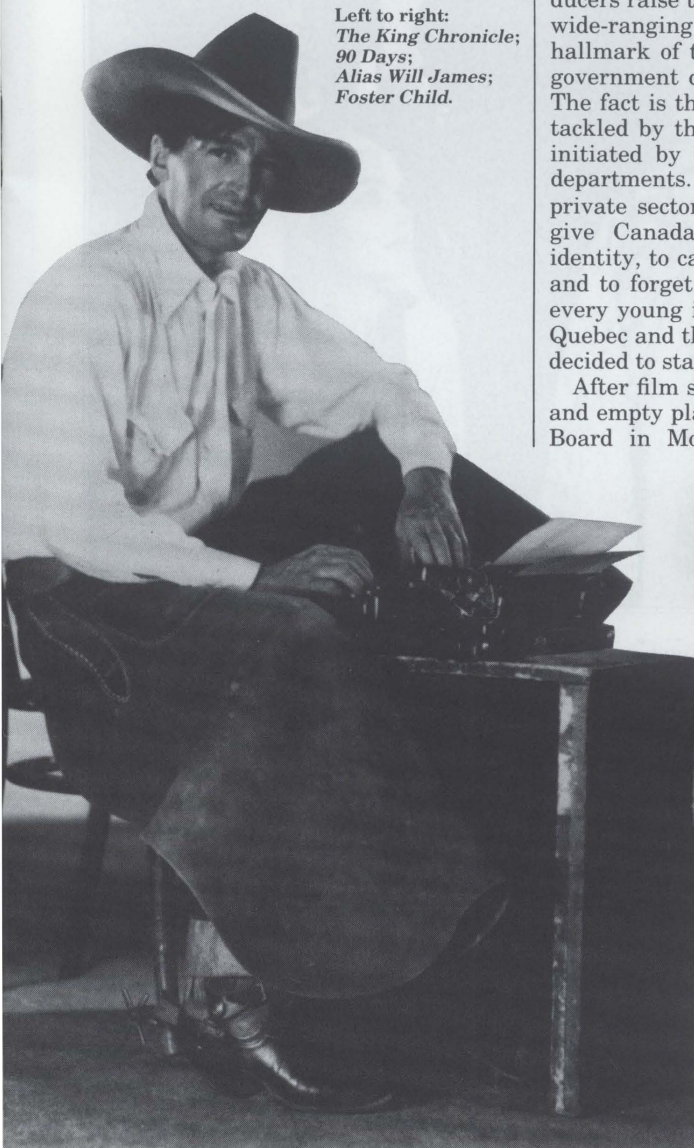
After film school, the world is a bleak and empty place. To be able to go to the Board in Montreal or at any of the

regional centres and ask for advice, to use equipment, usually without charge, to talk about difficulties and setbacks with experienced people who still consider documentary to be a work of service, this can make the difference between a film being made or abandoned. Pictures such as *My American Cousin*, *Life Classes*, *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing*, *Faustus Bidgood* are only a few among hundreds of features, shorts and videos which carry a credit thanking the NFB. Without the Film Board, there would be a void in the Canadian film landscape that it is appalling to think about.

Yet as the NFB passes into the second half of its 50th anniversary, it may lose the will to carry on the struggle. It has excellent films and growing audiences, all at risk as money runs out and production is delayed or cancelled. The Prime Minister will, in the next few months, appoint a new Government Film Commissioner. It goes without saying that it should be an individual with a sense of history, who knows what the Board stands for, who understands its strengths and is aware of its capabilities; who believes in the continuing importance of the mandate 'to interpret Canada to Canadians and to other nations' and in making sure it has the financial means to remain a distinct entity within the international documentary film movement.

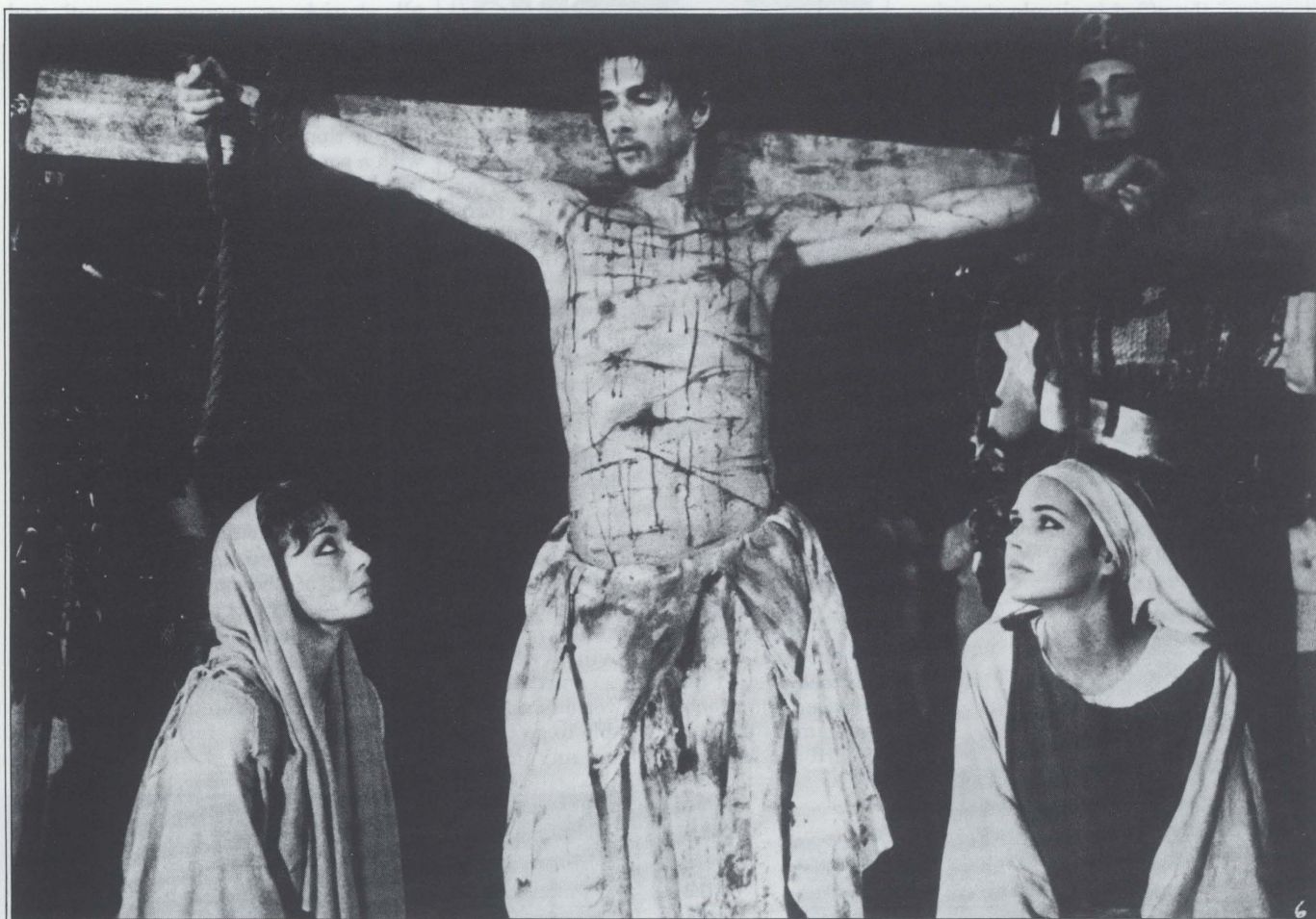
A global television revolution in satellite transmission and technology is going on around us of such complexity that the implications concerning what programmes will be shown and by whom are difficult to grasp. With it comes the need for a searching reappraisal of the place of documentary film in society. The form of documentary is far more profound and wide-ranging than it was fifty years ago. But these changes do not alter Grierson's belief that 'creation indicates not the making of things, but the making of virtues.'

Left to right:
The King Chronicle;
90 Days;
Alias Will James;
Foster Child.



the improbable rise of DENYS ARCAND

JOHN HARKNESS



Jésus de Montréal.

To see Denys Arcand on the podium at his Cannes Festival press conference last May, his film *Jésus de Montréal* in competition and a respectful audience of international film press in attendance, was to see the culmination of the improbable rise of a film-maker who, though not yet fifty, is now in his fourth distinct directorial career—and who had, as recently as 1980, been considered washed up. This is both a tribute to Arcand's talent and persistence and an indictment of the Canadian government's strange, inconsistent policies towards film in a land where cinema and television screens are dominated by American images.

One cannot discuss Canadian film-makers without the context of Canadian cinema and government policy towards

it. Virtually the only Canadian film-maker who has had a 'normal' career is David Cronenberg, who progressed from his highly regarded student films to a pair of low-budget exploitation films (*Shivers* and *Rabid*), through medium budget films (*The Brood* and *Scanners*) to larger budget, Hollywood-financed films (*The Dead Zone*, *The Fly*, *Dead Ringers*). Alone among Canadian directors, Cronenberg has spent the last decade making feature films, all of which have had international releases—never working for television or writing scripts for other directors or spending his spare time as an editor or cinematographer. Cronenberg does not consider himself a 'Canadian' film-maker, and to judge by his career pattern, he is not. Arcand, however, has

spent two decades making films that represent the effects of the shifting thought of the government film bureaucracies.

Born in 1941 in Deschambault, Quebec, Arcand studied history at the Université de Montréal, where he was bitten by the film-making bug. (At Cannes, Arcand was asked for historical references for the new thinking the film presents on the historical figure of Jesus Christ. He began citing a lengthy list of books and magazine articles, proving, if nothing else, that academic habits die hard.) He graduated in 1963, a time when few films were being made in Canada, other than at the National Film Board.

With a degree in history, he walked into the Board at a moment when it had

been asked to make short films on Canadian history. 'They were small films,' Arcand said, 'and no one wanted to make them.' He made short films—on historical subjects, on Montreal, on volleyball—until 1970, when at the height of both social activism at the NFB and leftism and separatism (the political desire of the French-Canadian population to secede from Canada) in Quebec, he made *On est au coton*, a 159-minute documentary on the life of Quebec textile workers, a film which brought him national fame.

The documentary portion of Arcand's career is not well known. *On est au coton*, which was officially banned by the NFB until 1976, has never been made available in English. The NFB claimed it was inaccurate, but Arcand has said that the Canadian Textile Institute (a lobbying group) was more accurate in objecting to its promotion of class warfare and the image it created of the textile industry. Likewise his 1981 film on the aftermath of the May 1980 referendum on secession from Canada, *Le confort et l'indifférence*. The refusal to make available a film which may disconcert audiences in Canada's other major language is not uncommon at the NFB. In 1985, citing the absence of audience interest, the Board struck no English language prints of *Passiflora*, a funny and caustic documentary on the near simultaneous visits to Montreal of Pope John Paul II and pop star Michael Jackson.

While the Board's mandate is to interpret Canada to Canadians, it tends to balk when one Canadian point of view suggests, say, that the overthrow of the capitalist system might be a good idea, or that a large number of Canadian citizens might be happier if they were not. 'The Film Board,' said Arcand in a 1972 interview, 'makes thousands of films to say that all goes well in Canada, that the western wheat fields are very beautiful, that Glenn Gould plays the piano well and that Paul Anka is an extraordinary star. So I think it is just normal that there should now and then be a film which says that everything is rotten and that we live in a country that is corrupt from top to bottom.'

Arcand's political documentaries—*On est au coton*, *Le confort et l'indifférence*, and *Quebec: Duplessis and After*—are among the most powerfully pessimistic documentaries Canada has produced. For Arcand, a left-wing Quebec intellectual, the 60s are not the age of hippies, of Woodstock and flower power, of protest against the war in Vietnam. Rather, they are the years of the Quiet Revolution (which ousted the autocratic and corrupt government of Maurice Duplessis), the October Crisis and the rise of the Parti Québécois. It is the decade, in fact, that gives form to one of Arcand's most persistent themes, betrayal. Betrayal on all levels, political, social and personal, runs through his films as a leitmotif of human behaviour in our time.

The owners of the textile mills



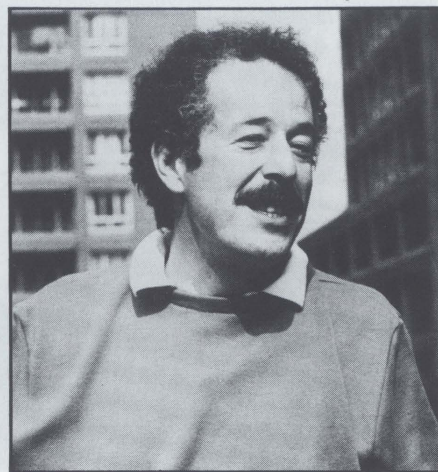
Rejeanne Padovani.

betrayed their workers; the Liberal Party (which replaced the Duplessis' Union Nationale party as the governing party in Quebec) betrayed the voters by becoming as corrupt as its predecessors; the people of Quebec betrayed themselves by voting down the Parti Québécois referendum on separation (the theme of *Le confort et l'indifférence*). Arcand in this period is an intellectual whose keynote is despair.

His second career as a director, which saw him move into feature films, has a striking continuity with his documentary period. The films he made in the early 1970s, *La Maudite Galette* (unavailable in English), *Rejeanne Padovani* and *Gina*, are journalistic—even muck-raking—exposés of political corruption and alienated labour and despairing studies of Quebec society.

During the late 60s and early 70s, the Canadian Film Development Corporation (CFMDC) began a programme to help directors make low-budget, personal films on Canadian subjects.

Denys Arcand.



Auteur rather than producer oriented, the CFMDC was of great assistance to the first generation of Canadian independent film-makers. Directors such as Don Shebib (*Goin' Down the Road*), Gilles Carle (*La Vraie Nature de Bernadette*) and Peter Pearson (*Paperback Hero*) were beneficiaries of this highly impractical policy, which saw that films were made but with no way for them to be shown in Canadian theatres, which were dominated by the Famous Players and Odeon theatre chains, the distribution market being largely divided among the American majors. Arcand benefited as well, and working in a culture that, unlike English Canada, saw itself as a separate culture and was hungry for images of itself, he found an outlet for his critiques of Quebec society. It did not hurt that he no longer had a large government-connected institution looking over his shoulder.

Rejeanne Padovani is an anti-thriller which uses a cool, formally controlled eye to expose political corruption. Vincent Padovani, a building contractor, hosts a dinner party to celebrate the opening of a new highway his company has built. The guests include the government minister responsible for the contract, the mayor of Montreal, the minister's secretary and Padovani's lawyer, who is about to be awarded a judgeship. With their wives dutifully in tow, they pass a quiet social evening, drinks and dinner, some entertainment, empty chitchat on cultural matters.

The dinner party is disrupted by news that a group of political activists is set to protest at the opening of the highway and by the arrival of Padovani's ex-wife, Rejeanne, who has come to see her children. By the end of the film, the activists' headquarters has been attacked and Rejeanne is dead, her body buried beneath the concrete of the highway.



Gina: Celine Lomez.

Despite favourable reviews and invitations to the Quinzaine des Réalisateurs at Cannes and the New York Film Festival, *Rejeanne Padovani* had little success beyond the French-speaking world. Although it can be synthesised as a thriller, it is not. The intricate dance of the characters, the parallel structure of the corrupt and powerful with their wives upstairs and their bodyguards (thugs and policemen) and mistresses below, the explicitly political themes and unwillingness to provide the audience with a happy ending mark it as a film which is not interested in being a thriller. Rather, it is a cold political analysis in a dramatic frame, designed to demonstrate the unlikelihood—indeed, the impossibility—of political reform within the current system. (It can be read, like *Night of the Living Dead*, as a horror movie where the monsters cannot be destroyed, because there are too many of them and they are virtually interchangeable.)

Arcand's next film—his last feature for almost a decade—is the most underrated of his films, and among the most important. If *Rejeanne Padovani* has a chill elegance and Chabrolian in-exorability, *Gina* is a perverse combination of lurid plot and austere style. Set in a small Quebec town, it is the story of a touring stripper, a documentary film crew and a gang of unemployed snowmobilers, an element so incongruous that it must be drawn from social reality. A film crew (led by Arcand's brother, Gabriel, who has appeared in several of his films) is making a film about the exploitation of the textile workers in the town's mills. They strike up a friendship with Gina (Celine Lomez), who is dancing in the town's bar. A gang of unemployed snowmobilers, offended by this relationship, gang-rapes Gina. She calls her manager, who arrives with some thugs from Montreal to punish the rapists. The film

crew is told to abandon its project and the director must return home to work on a police thriller. (Only in the atmosphere of Quebec, 1974, could this be a punishment.)

The importance of *Gina* is that it brings together for the first time the three themes that dominate Arcand's work. The betrayal of the film crew by its producers at the 'Office National du Cinéma' (an inside joke—the French name of the NFB is the Office National du Film) is the first. The second, introduced in *On est au coton*, is the alienation of people from their labour. The interview with the factory girl, for whom Gina's \$450 a week and travel represents an impossible glamour, is paralleled by Gina herself, who is

alienated from her labour—which is her sexuality. The striptease the film presents, with the camera focused resolutely on the dancer in a visual space that suggests utter isolation and that no audience is present, is at once erotic, because of Lomez' lush physical presence, and suggestive of a Satanic punishment for a life of misplaced sexuality, an eternal writhing in an empty room.

Gina adds sexuality, both as actuality and as a commodity, to the Arcand thematic package, which is brought to fruition in *The Decline of the American Empire* (1986).

In 1975, the Canadian government revamped the CFMDC and brought in

The Decline of the American Empire: the women ...



the 100 per cent tax shelter, which had very good consequences for film crews and for lawyers, accountants and brokerages who produced and sold the films. It had disastrous results for Canadian film culture. The majority of the directors who had begun in the 'auteur' period of Canadian cinema found it difficult to get work and the films, mostly quasi-American product, found little in the way of an audience and less in the way of critical support. If the old CFMDC had produced inexpensive pictures that made very little money, the new CFMDC, with the aid of the excess income of various dentists, made expensive movies that made very little money. The shelter developed almost no new directorial talent: most of Canada's leading film-makers today were either active before 1975 (Cronenberg, Arcand, Don Shebib, Francis Mankiewicz) or have emerged since the shelter (Atom Egoyan, Patricia Rozema, Sandy Wilson).

Arcand made his third major documentary, *Le confort et l'indifférence*, during this period. In the early 80s, the CFMDC metamorphosed into Telefilm Canada, and the powers that be decided that since our ersatz American features did not do very well, Canada would become the purveyors of mini-series to the world. This led to the creation of a genuine mutant, a film made as a feature for theatrical release and as a mini-series for television. These horrible hybrids were generally unsuccessful, since producers seldom understood that if a story can be told in two hours, stretching it to four was mere padding, and if the story required four or six hours, then it would be badly cut to fit into two. Producer Jamie Brown (*Obsessed*) has said, 'If you conceive of failure as a moving target, every time it moves the government makes sure you're pointed directly at it.'

Arcand, however, returned to film-making in 1983, when he was hired by the CBC to direct three episodes of *Empire, Inc.*, a six-hour mini-series conceived by Mark Blandford and writer Douglas Bowie. It dealt with an Anglophone business tycoon's career in Montreal from the depths of the Depression (Episode II, Arcand's first contribution to the series, was titled 'Brother, Can You Spare \$17 Million?') to the late 50s. Although regarded in many quarters as Canada's *Dallas*, it was quite different. While it had the requisite elements of family melodrama—philandering, grown children involved with sex and communism, father-son divisions over the future of the business—it also had as an integral part of its mood the conflict between English money and power against the French fact of Quebec, one of the most divisive elements of Quebec culture. While it is satisfying melodrama—it even ran on some independent American stations—it is much more if one is aware of its subtexts, which Canadian audiences surely were.

One irony of Canadian film is that French-Canadian directors are seldom honoured for their work in English. The late Claude Jutra's work in English was generally ignored, even though *By Design* was one of his best films, as was Francis Mankiewicz's *And Then You Die*, a gritty urban thriller for CBC. With *Empire, Inc.*, most of the glory devolved upon Blandford and Bowie, and rightly so. A year later, Arcand directed *Le Crime d'Ovide Plouffe*, a sequel to the French-Canadian hit *La Famille Plouffe*. It was a conventional work, stuffed with predictable melodramatic situations.

The important thing about *Empire, Inc.* and *Le Crime d'Ovide Plouffe*, however, is that, in a way, they freed Arcand. They were professional,

not personal assignments. Arcand's personal films from the early 70s, despite their qualities, are lacking in 'entertainment values'. Dour, political, highly intelligent, they are films which say important things very directly. Perhaps the final failure of Quebec separatism lightened his tone—after *Le confort et l'indifférence*, what could he say? But his episodes of *Empire, Inc.* are strikingly well-made entertainments. The two films which have made Arcand's contemporary reputation, *The Decline of the American Empire* and *Jésus de Montréal*, are also tremendously intelligent entertainments.

The late 80s have been a time when government policy on film, as reflected in Telefilm Canada, has been in a state of confusion. What has happened is that film-makers have slipped through the cracks in policy, and one of them was Arcand, who was contacted by Roger Frappier, an ex-radical separatist film-maker turned producer, who suggested that Arcand was better than the work he was doing. Frappier offered a small sum of money to produce something he had written. According to Arcand, he knew that with that budget, he had to make something inexpensive, and nothing was less expensive than to film people talking. (The documentarian speaks.) He also knew that the talk had to hold an audience.

The Decline of the American Empire is a minor miracle of film-making—its characters are intellectuals, its location limited, there is very little eroticism to go along with all the talk of sex (in contrast to, say, Eric Rohmer, who generally offers the pleasures of the flesh to accompany his characters' logorrhoea) and the film undergoes a startling shift of tone in the last twenty minutes which provides the emotional punch. It is a successful film with no budget, no stars (save to a Québécois audience) and no action.

The set-up is simple. In a lakeside summer house, four men, all history teachers at Laval University, prepare an elaborate dinner while they talk about sex, or rather, about the logistics and stratagems of seduction and evasion. Simultaneously, four women associated romantically and professionally with the men work out at a nearby gymnasium, and talk about sex as a physical activity. They later come together at the dinner, and talk about their careers, until the oldest woman in the group reveals that she has slept with both her colleagues, much to the surprise of the attending wife, who had no idea that her husband was a compulsive philanderer.

While this sounds like a Rohmer film—or *The Big Chill*, or even *For Jonah Who Will Be 25 in the Year 2000*—as relics of the 60s bemoaning their lost youth and idealism, rather than a film from the director of Rejeanne Padovani, it is very much an Arcand film. The set-up, a dinner party among presumably cultured, intelligent people, is very similar to that of

... and the men: Pierre Curzi, Rémy Girard, Yves Jacques, Daniel Brière.





Jésus de Montréal: Catherine Wilkening, Lothaire Bluteau, Johanne-Marie Tremblay.

Rejeanne Padovani. (It is also, of course, a Buñuelian set-up, and one suspects that *The Exterminating Angel* and *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* are among Arcand's favourite films.)

The older men in the group are all alienated from their work. 'When I was young,' says Rémy Girard, 'I thought I would be another Toynbee or Braudel.' Now he just does his job. The gay man claims that he only feels alive when he is cruising. The youngest woman is a student who also worked in a massage parlour, where she met her lover, masturbating him while nattering on about millennial cults in medieval Europe. Even the sexual compulsiveness of the men is alienated from their selves. Almost all they talk about is tactical, where to go so you will not meet someone you know, how to fool your wife into thinking you are working late, the staggering banality of the conversation in singles bars.

The Decline of the American Empire is structured like a baroque Concerto Grosso, the men and the women representing separate orchestral groups and each character permitted a solo counterposed with the tutti. Its stated theme, that societies given over to the pursuit of purely personal happiness are inevitably societies in decline (hence the title) hides the real themes that emerge in the solos—the way that the modern world alienates people not merely from work but from their sexuality. If one listens closely to the talk of sex, the gay academic is not the only one out cruising for anonymous trade—the men view the women as targets or conquests, the women merely see bodies. No one beyond their tightly knit group exists as a character. The exception is the leatherclad biker (Gabriel Arcand, again his brother's surrogate) who is the lover of one of the women and arrives at the dinner, shocked to find, after all the talk of sex, that they are merely eating, rather than having an orgy.

Jésus de Montréal was inspired by an incident during the casting of *The Decline of the American Empire*. Arcand was auditioning a bearded actor, who noted that, if necessary, he could shave, but he was currently playing Jesus in the Passion Play mounted each summer at St Joseph's Oratorio on the mountain in the centre of Montreal. Arcand became fascinated by the type of work actors do between the assignments that keep them alive artistically—that is, alienating labour like dubbing porno movies into French or narrating television documentaries.

Between the seed of the idea and the completion of the script, Arcand became an internationally famous, Academy Award nominated film-maker, and subject to the international apparatus of the celebrity press. In *Jésus de Montréal*, a young actor of considerable talent and intelligence lands the job of playing Jesus in and directing the Passion Play. Rather than treat the assignment as degrading—something novice actors do to gain credit—he treats it as a serious piece of work. He casts good actors in the production, researches and virtually rewrites the play, becoming, unexpectedly, the toast of Montreal. This allows Arcand to sketch some brutal caricatures of Montreal media figures—one of whom, seemingly oblivious, got up at the Cannes press conference and asked Arcand a question as if he hadn't displayed his utter contempt for her.

Jésus de Montréal is about maintaining one's integrity in a world where reality is a problematic concept, an appropriate enough theme for a film-maker who became an overnight success after twenty years of making films, a young man from Deschambault who found himself in the back seat of a limousine being stroked by the head of Paramount Pictures.

Arcand presents an urbane and witty persona. He seems, and his most recent films seem, far removed from the

radical intellectual who once denounced Canadian society as 'rotten from top to bottom'. But *Jésus de Montréal* and *The Decline of the American Empire* are films by a man with a powerful moral sense. It is neither accident nor coincidence that the one time he has acted in his films (in *Jésus*), he played a judge, or that his brother Gabriel frequently plays outsiders and observers in his films. His moral sense can get the better of him at times. In *Jésus de Montréal*, for example, the scene in which the protagonist destroys a video set-up at a commercial audition because he dislikes the way the casting director is treating the actors—it is the scene where Jesus drives the money-changers from the temple of art—is overwrought and overstated in the worst way. But it is his moral sense that gives the films their sting.

The hilarious, virtuoso comic set-pieces in the two films—the porno dubbing scene in *Jésus*, for example—are what hold the audience. But the resonances come from their deeply rooted seriousness about human relations in a corrupt world. When the betrayal of the marriage in *The Decline* is revealed, it shatters the comic tone Arcand has spent eighty minutes building, and we realise that the comedy was there to set the hook. The seeming betrayal of the comic tone is the pay-off.

In *Jésus*, Arcand does not seem bothered that the priest who acts as the Passion Play's producer has violated his vow of celibacy and taken one of the actresses as his mistress. We are, he seems to say, men of the world. But that betrayal of a vow does establish the priest's weakness, and sets up his betrayal of the actors when he knuckles under to powerful parishioners who do not want the successful but traditional Passion Play tampered with.

In the early part of his career, Arcand was a provincial. His films were about and largely of interest to Quebec. (His documentaries require an exhaustive knowledge and obsessive interest in Quebec's political history.) He seemed doomed to local success with occasional exposure on the international festival circuit.

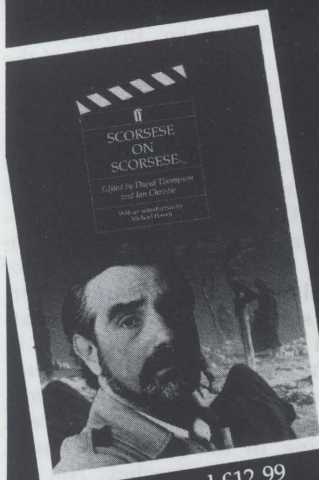
With *The Decline of the American Empire* and *Jésus de Montréal*, however, he has moved on to the international film scene while remaining resolutely Canadian. (At the Cannes press screening of *Jésus de Montréal*, there were certain jokes, like the priest's fear of being transferred to a parish in Winnipeg, that revealed precisely the location of every Canadian in the auditorium.) But by moving beyond his claustrophobic sense of Quebec to broader, more recognisable concerns—the responsibilities of relationships, the position of art in a world of publicity, striking tragic tones in comic contexts—he has become one of the most important of contemporary directors. He has learned how to sweeten the medicine without reducing its potency. ■



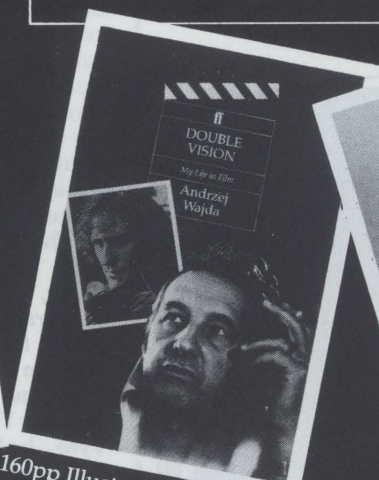
FABER FILM BOOKS

for the autumn

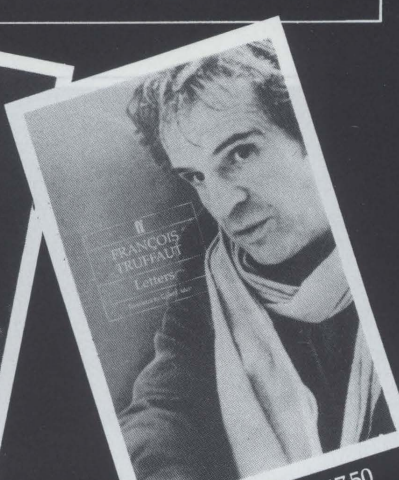
'The publisher with the strongest
cinema list is Faber.' *Guardian*



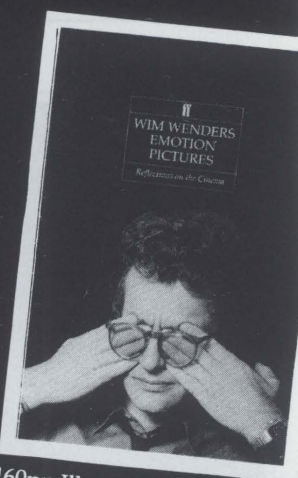
208pp Illustrated £12.99



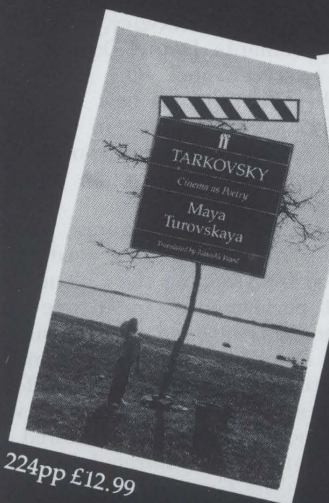
160pp Illustrated £14.99



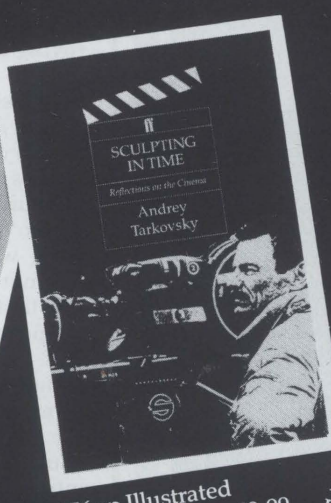
608pp Illustrated £17.50



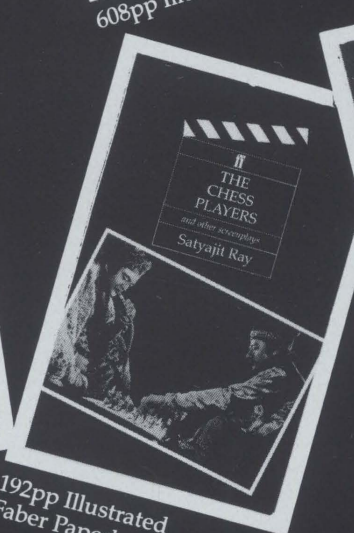
160pp Illustrated £12.99



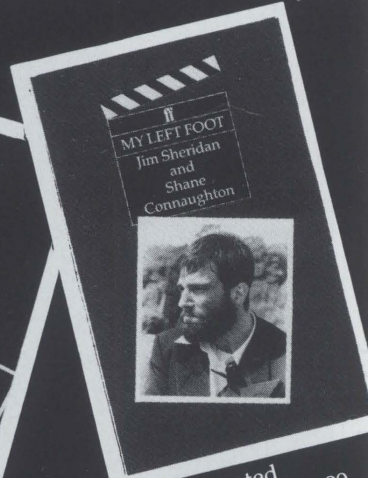
224pp £12.99



256pp Illustrated
Faber Paperback £9.99



192pp Illustrated
Faber Paperback £7.99



96pp Illustrated
Faber Paperback £5.99

COMING SOON TO A BOOKSHOP NEAR YOU!

If you are interested in receiving a full listing of Faber Film books
please complete this coupon and send to The Promotions Manager,
Faber and Faber, 3 Queen Square, London WC1N 3AU.

Name _____ Address _____

-F R A M E D-

daniel day-lewis

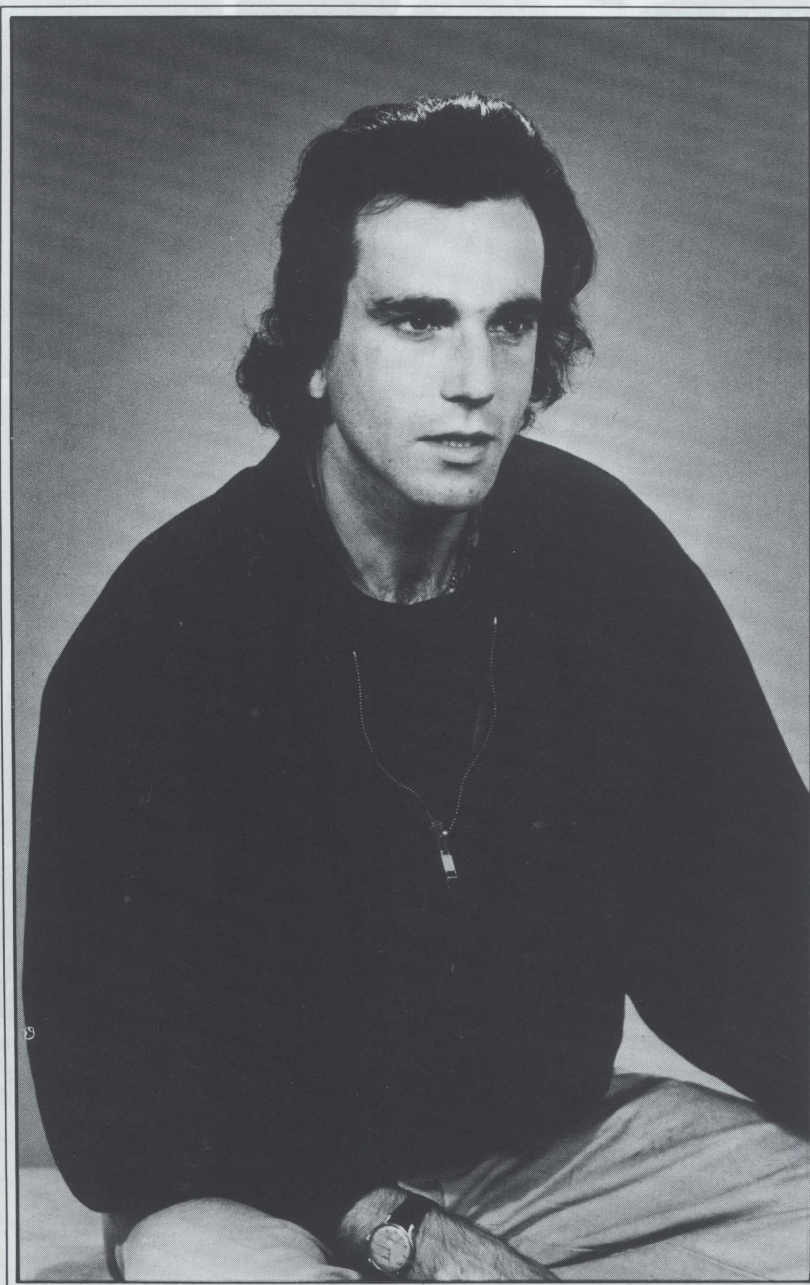


PHOTO SARAH QUILL

To have one famous parent may be regarded as a misfortune; to have two looks like catastrophe. But Daniel Day-Lewis, grandson of Michael Balcon and son of Jill Balcon and the late Poet Laureate, belies the sub-Wildean adage. A talented and sensitive but normal child, he staged his main teenage rebellion by running away from Sevenoaks School to join his sister in the freer world of Bedales. Today, at 32, with every excuse for both family pride and personal vanity, he remains both unassuming and private—vulnerable but dogged in his convictions, fastidious with words but often collapsing into laughter: an actor of the new, unstagey breed with (as he modestly puts it) ‘a price on his head’.

He has become a hot property in some unusual parts. His latest to be seen in British cinemas is that of the late Christy Brown, the Dublin writer and artist with cerebral palsy, in Jim Sheridan’s *My Left Foot*. Meanwhile, at the National Theatre, he was a controversial *Hamlet*; and before that, flickering to and fro on his long legs as a frantic, farcical British innocent in a grotesque America, he single-handedly rescued Pat O’Connor’s *Stars and Bars*. In Philip Kaufman’s Kundera adaptation, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, he played the intent and lecherous brain surgeon; but his two best-known film parts are as the gay punk in Stephen Frears’ *My Beautiful Laundrette*, and—in James Ivory’s *A Room with a View*—the prissy, prosy Cecil Vyse, looking in his pince-nez like a clean-shaven Lytton Strachey. Not exactly the Mel Gibson heart-throb: yet with his hawk’s profile, his dark hair, Byronic eyes, and tall, wiry, controlled, roving movements, Daniel Day-Lewis is indeed a screen idol. On stage, his whiplash sexuality was best shown as the wily school vamp in *Another Country*. Although very far from gay, he exudes equivocal danger like a gipsy not quite of this world.

His first public performance, he recalls, was very different. ‘I used to be fascinated by Trooping the Colour, and my first performance—to anyone that happened to be around in the house—was the Fainting Guardsman. I had a rather splendid Guardsman’s uniform in my dressing-up box, and so that was my first portrayal, closely followed by Yuri Gagarin’s first miraculous flight into space. The Guardsman was a sort of mythological figure like Everyman—Every Guardsman; but Gagarin was my first specific hero. For that, I didn’t actually have a spaceman’s uniform, but I did have a string shopping-bag which for some reason seemed to me to represent quite adequately the spaceman’s helmet.’

By the age of 14, he was already thinking seriously about acting—without, he says, ‘any direct understanding of what it means.’ In a Bedales school production of *The Winter’s Tale*, he played the young princely lover

Florizel; and there was irony in at least two of his speeches.

It is my father's music
To speak your deeds.

Daniel's father C. Day-Lewis, who had himself played Florizel at school, had greeted his birth with 'music' of his own, in an exultant poem, rejoicing that 'we time-worn folk' could be renewed 'at your enchanted spring'.

Should I now meet my father,
He would not call me son.

Thus Florizel went on; but Daniel's father was proud and delighted to see him on stage. The tragedy was that, himself time-worn and dying of cancer, he survived only a few months after the Bedales' performance, and never saw his son's later triumphs. This is something that still scars Daniel. Perhaps it even colours his reading of *Hamlet*. He is, after all, an actor who inhabits his roles—not 'being the person', but 'creating for yourself the illusion that you are.' The carefully drawn distinction is characteristic.

Jean Renoir said of Jean Gabin: 'He got his greatest effects with the smallest means. He could overwhelm the audience with a mere flicker of his eyelids.' He went on: 'I devised scenes for his benefit which could be spoken in a murmur. We had no idea that this style of acting was to be adopted all over the world.'

Daniel Day-Lewis shares with Gabin the precious ability to incarnate his thoughts and feelings. But, unlike Gabin, he will not play cards between film takes, get up, act, then return to the table. 'A lesson I learned quite early on is that, much as one loves to talk to the people that are around—and there are always interesting people on film sets—it's very important jealously to preserve the time between takes, actually to prepare oneself for the next moment of filming.' After all, 'When you know the camera may be on for thirty seconds, you have to know precisely where you're coming from, to be able to arrive at the necessary place at the moment the camera's switched on. The most important life you have to construct is the life that's outside the moment when the camera is turning.'

Daniel's first film role was as a child in *Sunday Bloody Sunday*; and his next, years later, was a bit part in *Gandhi*. 'I remember going to see Richard Attenborough. I'd been to see the casting director on one occasion, and my agent had had various complaints about my appearance because I was notoriously scruffy and often unshaven. I went to one interview, for a director whose name I shan't mention, but I won't ever work for him, that's for sure. He let it be known to my agent that I should go back looking more presentable the next day—which I found humiliating. Thereafter I took stock of that a little bit, and I went to see Richard's casting agent and I put on a secondhand suit and a bow tie. I didn't know what part I was going up for, so I thought some stuffed English officer. And she said: "Can you

come back next week and try not to look like a poet's son?" She really did in a nice way what had been done in an extremely unpleasant way before. So I didn't shave for a week and put on all my old gear and went to see Richard Attenborough. He said: "How tall are you?" And I said: "Six foot one-and-a-half." He said: "You're a good boy"—and that was the end of the interview. It was to play a hooligan, needless to say.'

There followed the television version of *Frost in May*, which led on to the film *How Many Miles to Babylon*. To tv, Daniel prefers film—not simply because it offers more rehearsal time. 'I like the quality of film; I like the machinery involved in it; I like the cameras. I don't like those television Daleks that glide around you while you pretend you're having tea. You always seem to be having meals in dramas on television.'

As regards stage versus screen acting: 'I really try never to make that distinction. Of course it's easier to hide on a stage—you can even turn your back if you want to. But in the end all it means is that you are better able to hide your inadequacy. I don't set about the preparation in a different way. The only difference, so far as I can tell, is in the very practical demands that are made when working in the theatre in terms of filling a space, as opposed to the practical demands that are made when working in a very confined space around a camera, where you may have to lean two-and-a-half degrees to the left and put your elbow on a mantelpiece, and not move from that position but somehow give the impression of physical freedom. Those are the sort of details that clutter up one's imagination. The whole point is that imaginatively the source should be exactly the same.'

Yet both stage and screen have contrasting assets. 'From the actor's point of view, the theatre offers you potentially an opportunity to create a much more rounded, complete reality, because of the chronological sequence—even in a play where you're going backwards and forwards in time. You create that time sequence for yourself; you modulate your energy as you need to. In a way, you edit yourself. So from that point of view you're much more at the helm of your own reality. But theatre doesn't work, on the whole; we have to say that too. Films tend to work—even bad films, in a strange way. Bad theatre doesn't work; and most theatre is bad. The moments when one sees good theatre, one realises what it's all about. Those moments are very rare.'

'I like filming on location. I like places that have ghosts. Studios don't have ghosts. You can be in a studio and think: "God—this is the studio that such-and-such a film was made in," and it's an extraordinary feeling. But somehow they don't, for me, contain ghosts. The sets are built and they're destroyed. I like places which already have a life to offer you; and I find that you actually have to work much harder to find a life in a constructed set. On location, the life that is there already

may create a tension for you—go against what you're working with or trying to discover. But that in itself can be turned to an advantage. In the *Laundrette*, standing under Vauxhall Bridge at three in the morning, you couldn't help but be affected by it—by that place, that weather, that time.'

Daniel Day-Lewis greatly admires Tarkovsky and his juxtaposition of apparently incongruous images. 'What he is doing is creating visual poetry.' Of his own films: 'I can't really talk about them, because I don't really enjoy to watch them as films. Filming and theatre tend to involve an endless sequence of infidelities, and very, very disturbing infidelities because the love affair is a passionate one, and therefore the betrayal in the aftermath is that much more painful. In films, particularly, I'm appalled by the process whereby one can fall in love, be part of the thing, be encouraged to be a part of it, and then no longer be of any use to it—actually be discouraged from playing any part in its continued life, except in so far as one can appear in magazines and talk nonsense in interviews.'

His favourite of his own films, at present, is *My Left Foot*—partly because he was with it from the start, partly because he was so moved by what he saw and heard in the Sandymount Clinic when researching cerebral palsy, partly because he was so warmly accepted by Christy Brown's family during and after the filming. When the Dublin audience decided 'that the film belonged to them,' he says, 'it was a really extraordinary event.'

My Beautiful Laundrette, however, 'was the first film that I ever passionately wanted to do. It was the first time that I understood what an enjoyable process filming could be, even though it was agonising at times.' Touring to publicise it, he was asked the inevitable question. Why, in *A Room with a View*, did he play such an awful wimp? He had told James Ivory: 'No one in their right mind would admit to seeing themselves as Cecil Vyse—but that's the character I love.' Why? 'He contains within himself some of the things I would most dread to contain within myself. My compassion for someone who can't open his mouth without alienating himself draws me towards him with such violence that I can quite happily take on that life. It's a tremendous luxury to explore one's fears.'

Would he ever contemplate superstardom as some invincible hero? 'I do find flawed human beings more attractive—damaged goods. But quite a number of films perpetuate a rather agreeable mythology—a cosmetic mythology—that some human beings find life incredibly easy. I love to be taken in by that. I love Clint Eastwood, and I love to see that lack of doubt. At the same time, if I ever seriously met a person who had no doubt, I'd be quite frightened.'

RICHARD MAYNE

1871

1871, a story of Paris, the theatre and politics at the time of the Commune, was filmed by Ken McMullen this summer on location in Portugal. James Leahy, who collaborated on the script, kept a production diary.

By Way of Introduction . . . My involvement with *1871* began at the time of the British release in May 1986 of *Zina*, the previous film by director Ken McMullen. I'd liked *Zina* a lot, reviewed it and interviewed Ken about it. Ken showed me the story outline for *1871*, on which he was trying to raise development money. The main action was set in Paris, between the Universal Exposition of 1867, when the world (and its royalty) flocked to the City of Light to attend the last triumph of Napoleon III's Second Empire, and the Commune of 1871.

Both my wife Gaila and I had been excited by the story, though I'd been dubious about the prospects of getting the film made. British producers might be reluctant to support a historical film set in Paris, while the French were likely to resent foreigners talking about their history, particularly about events which were so deeply and bitterly rooted in the fundamental political divisions of the Third Republic.

Ken had already set up the basic emotional triangle of Grafton, the British aristocrat, diplomat and spy; O'Brien, the Irishman in hiding in Paris as a result of his involvement with the Fenian movement; and the actress, Séverine Duras. Also the idea that all three were involved in the theatre where Séverine worked. This framework has persisted through all versions of the screenplay into the film, as has the idea that Séverine, and the theatrical performances in which she stars, should be politicised and liberated by the events they all live through: the Franco-Prussian War, the Siege of Paris, the Commune and its suppression.

Ken had first become interested in the period when, while making *Ghost-dance*, he had filmed in the Père

Writing History in Lightning

Lachaise Cemetery, site of some of the final battles and most infamous executions in the bloody week of the suppression of the Commune. He had drawn on Zola's *La Bête Humaine* for background. I fed into the pot two other novels by Zola, *Nana* and *La Débâcle*. The former led immediately to the idea that the theatre should be concerned with erotic musical spectacle rather than culture, and to the invention of Ramborde, its corrupt owner. Also to the idea that the patriotic spectacle the theatre presents on the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War should feature the battle-cry of the time 'To Berlin'; though most of the lyrics for that show were, I think, written by Terry James, the third collaborator on the screenplay.

I guess it was for this kind of input that Ken had invited me into the project. My love of the work of Jean Renoir had led me to an interest in nineteenth-century French literature, particularly Zola, Maupassant and Flaubert, and art (Renoir's father, Manet, Cézanne), as well as some knowledge of the political history of the Third Republic.

Manet, of course, led to the invention of the character of the Streetsinger, who was conceived as a popular contrast to Séverine, on the basis of the visual material, with perhaps some prompting, on the unconscious level, from memories of Nicholas Ray's *The James Brothers* and my interest in the role of the griot in African oral literature. It was only in Portugal that I discovered that the journalist, novelist and member of the Commune Jules Vallès had, in the 1860s, opposed Thérèse, a singer of popular origin, known, indeed, as 'The Singer of the Gutters', to singer/courtesans such as Hortense Schneider (Offenbach's original 'Belle Hélène', and one of the models for Nana).

I guess this is a good example of how we worked: letting a certain amount of research liberate our imagination and instincts about the social and discursive history of the time. Here and elsewhere, our imaginations came up with what was the right answer historically.

Though Channel 4 put up money for scriptwriting and development which started to come through in December 1986, some time after work had got under way, it was not until January 1989 that it seemed there was a real

prospect of the film going into production.

Ken had managed to put together a package involving, in addition to Channel 4's investment, Swedish and French money and Portuguese facilities, and had found a theatre, in Evora, Portugal, that seemed ideal for our requirements. But all through casting, and despite the fact that a production office had been opened in London and work started in Portugal, the film seemed on the verge of collapse under the weight of contractual and legal arguments. On at least one occasion, it was only kept going by a quickly negotiated loan from Ken's bank. All the time, we were aware that, if one part of the jigsaw were to slip out of place, perhaps as a result of delay, the whole pattern would disintegrate. As they say in Hollywood, the deal is the art form, not the movie. For an independent producer/director with a vision to protect, the deal and the need to make it legally secure are, if anything, even more important.

It was not until **Friday 14 April** that the film started to feel real when I talked about it, or about my plans for the immediate future.

Penelope (Houston) called from **SIGHT & SOUND**: she'd been interested by the press release I'd sent her, and liked my idea that I should do some sort of production diary. She said the film sounded like a cross between *Les Enfants du Paradis* and *Senso*. Thinking of our sources and influences, I replied: 'More a cross between *Le Crime de M Lange* and *The Golden Coach*.'

I guess it was rash of me to propose a diary. I have never been able to keep one. Nevertheless, the form is appealing: it gives an immediate structure to the story one has to tell. Moreover, when a film is being shot, the basic chronology of events is recorded in the daily call-sheets. Even the most inefficient diarist is thus presented with a provocative and memory-stirring narrative outline. This framework is sufficiently strong to permit occasional flashes forward and back to pursue themes as they emerge, and explore and develop personal concerns.

Next came a call from Davina (Nicholson) in the Production Office that Ana Padrão had been cast as

Séverine. She's an unknown quantity for us, a star in a Portuguese tv soap opera. There were one or two strong candidates we met in London, and we could only hope Ken had made the right choice. (He had!)

Finally, some time after ten, another telephone call, this one from Jackie (Jacqueline Dankworth), our street-singer, with a real poser: how much speaking and singing in French was she likely to be called on to undertake? I had to sound confident and reassuring, while admitting frankly that I had no idea. A French translation of the script had just been completed, but no final decision had been taken about the language in which the film would be shot. I told Jackie I'd make sure there was a copy of the French language script available for her at the Production Office.

The issue was complicated. If we abandoned linguistic naturalism, and used English throughout, the Portuguese performers were likely to be in difficulty, being generally more fluent in French. In the case of Séverine this would not matter: it was part of our conception that she generated mystery about her origins, so either language would be appropriate, and an accent unimportant. Of course, the best and most naturalistic solution would be to make French the normal language for the French characters, English that for the bulk of the expatriates. There was no problem about turning the theatre-owner, Ramborde, into an ex-pat once Tim Spall was cast. On the other hand, whatever national origin we might invent for Jackie as the Streetsinger, for any kind of naturalism to be preserved she would need to sing and speak in French to communicate to her popular audience.

The idea that O'Brien (John Lynch) should speak English, even when addressed in French, seemed psychologically convincing. In O'Brien's scenes with Cluseret (Jack Klaff), it was plausible that both should speak English. The historical Cluseret, though a Parisian by birth and an ex-officer in the French army, was, by the period of the film, an American citizen and writing articles and pamphlets in both languages. Nevertheless, there were some scenes where he clearly needed to

speaking French. One of them turned out to be on the first morning of shooting.

Ken took the plunge at the last minute, deciding to try the scene in French just before the first run through of the dialogue. It was a gamble, and we won't really know if it has paid off till post-synching has been completed. It put a great deal of pressure on Jack and Jackie, who responded bravely; but I feel, all in all, it was a risk worth taking. One Frenchman, Henri Darbot, commenting on the international influx for the Great Exposition, declared: 'French is the language least heard on the Paris streets.' The Commune was equally cosmopolitan, as the involvement of exiles like Frankel (from Hungary), Dombrowski (from Poland) and Elisabeth Dmitrieff (from Russia) demonstrates. If we can free the film from the restraints of being tied to one language, and evoke that kind of internationalism, we'll have a film that is really quite special.

Tuesday 18 April: Screening of Renoir's *French Cancan* at the National

Film Archive, arranged at Ken's request. Present: Jackie, Roshan Seth (Grafton), Barrie Guard (composer), Simon Heyworth (music producer), Terry and myself. I explain that, although *French Cancan* is set nearly twenty years after our film, Ken hoped we'd be able to evoke a comparable atmosphere. As always with a Renoir film, no matter how many times I've seen it before, I was totally swept away by the energy of the narrative and characterisation. I think some of the others were a bit shocked and puzzled: it was not the kind of film they'd expected Ken to enthuse over. Barrie was, however, impressed by the score. He and Simon then took us off to find a piano on which he could play us the tunes he'd sketched out, at very short notice, for our film.

Monday 24 April: I catch the plane by the skin of my teeth. I'd lost a full two days' work the previous week, having unexpectedly spent over a day in hospital for what proved to be a pretty uncomfortable investigation of

recurring pains in my lower abdomen. Even now the doctors are only 80 per cent sure that it's nothing serious, as the X-ray department last Friday was monopolised by a Royal personage, and its facilities not available to take a look at me. Perhaps it was a classic case of denial, refusing to acknowledge the possibility of my own mortality, but my anxieties were all focused on whether I'd be fit to travel to Portugal rather than the long-term implications of the diagnosis.

We're met at Lisbon Airport and taken straight out to Evora, and the Teatro Garcia de Resende. In fact, it was Catarina, one of the production runners, who had first taken Ken there when she'd heard what he was looking for, and after he'd failed to find it in Lisbon. Spatially and visually, the theatre is perfect for the needs of the film. But it is totally lacking in sound-proofing. Traffic noises, passers-by, even dogs and birds, are clearly audible in the auditorium. Yet this has been conceived of as predominantly a direct-sound film, to ensure that immediacy in the performances which only direct sound can provide. Street noises prove to be perhaps one of the less important of the problems concerning sound that recur throughout the shoot.

Post-synchronisation is dominant in Portuguese production; lights are noisy, camera-cranes creak and tracks rumble; sometimes radio-mikes fail. We are to have several panics about the quality of the sound. One caused a special trip to London by Bill (Diver), the editor, who, with Peter Carlton, the sound editor, is still (as of 21 July) trying to resolve some of the sound problems encountered during shooting.

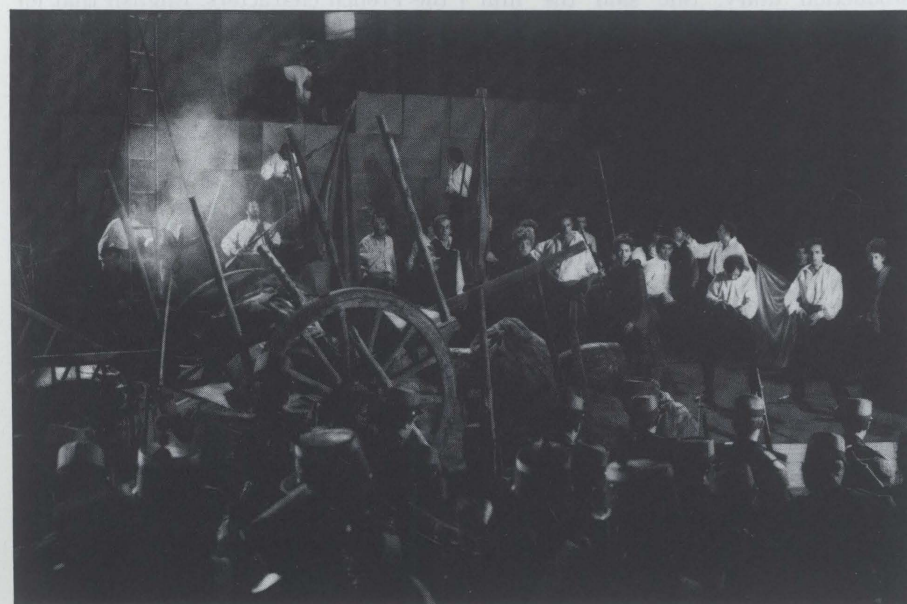
Tuesday 25 April: Today is a holiday, commemorating the anniversary of the Revolution. In the evening, Ken gives drinks for the cast. We've already met Ana, who comes across as very enthusiastic and friendly. I have a long talk with Alexandre de Sousa, cast as General the Marquis de Gallifet, trying to explain to him in my halting French the history of the character.

Gallifet is one of the characters we've drawn from history. He was from the aristocracy of the *ancien régime*. During the Second Empire he lived the carefree life of a young man about town. He's probably the only person in Tissot's masterpiece *'Le Cercle de la Rue Royale'* who is of any interest to modern historians, and appears in fictional guise in Proust's *Swann's Way*, as General de Froberville. He was a ruthless organiser of the contra-guerrilla squads against the Juaristas in Mexico. He was equally merciless during the suppression of the Commune, and is generally credited with rejecting one woman's plea for mercy with the words: 'Madame, I have frequented every theatre in Paris; your acting will have no effect on me.'

Before research had revealed the historical Gallifet to us, Ken had suspected that such a man might have been in the

In the theatre: Ken McMullen (right) and Elso Roque.

Below: the troops confront the actors. Photos: Frank Connor.





Leda (Ana Padrão) and the Swan. Photo: James Leahy.

audience for Séverine's prewar stage shows. In fact, I found him to have been, like his rich wife, an old friend of the Prince of Wales, who was an inveterate connoisseur of theatrical talent in both Paris and London, and who, in our film, is the first of Séverine's lovers.

Gallifet, nevertheless, was a hero on the battlefield in both the Mexican and Franco-Prussian wars. Unlike most of the old aristocracy, he seems not to have been anti-semitic; he was the Minister of War who arranged the pardon and release of Colonel Dreyfus, the Jewish victim of France's most notorious miscarriage of justice. Alexandre looks perfect for the part, and as shooting went on his performance was to go from strength to strength. He's right as the modest war hero, deferential when accompanying the Prince of Wales to the Paris theatres, while his portrayal of the executioner of the Communards is a tour de force. His French was good enough for him to be able to improvise new lines on the basis of the speeches and information we'd given him, which highlight and round out the ruthlessness of the character.

Wednesday 26 April: The great day at last! We're on location. In the morning, Cluseret and the relief of Fort D'Issy. Ken has opted for the outlines of the struggle rather than naturalistic detail. No extras except a dead Communard beside Cedric, the street-urchin, whom Jack (Cluseret) finds perched on a barrel of gunpowder, prepared to blow up himself and the attacking Versailles troops should they attempt to occupy the fort, which has been abandoned by its garrison. Approaching from the distance, three cavalymen representing the invading forces of Versailles.

It's an ambitious visual metaphor for the military plight of the Commune, and, to Jack's amazement, Ken proposes to realise it all in one take. Cedric looks great as the Gavroche figure we'd

imagined for the earlier urchin scenes, set in 1867, but a bit young for the orphan of the Commune Cluseret describes in his *Mémoires*. I'd imagined a pair of brothers taking on the part, the younger for 1867, the older for 1871. Jack struggles bravely with his French dialogue, and with the high wind which repeatedly threatens to remove his hat in mid-take.

Saturday 29 April: We're on stage inside the theatre, for the first scene on the restaurant set. Construction was seriously delayed in the weeks before shooting. Unexpectedly, there was a performance in the theatre, and a full day could not be worked, nor anything permanent erected. The set was still not ready on Friday, and we'd had to rehearse elsewhere. The scene has Cluseret introducing an account of the French atrocities in Mexico, presented by a crippled war veteran, before unveiling what is recognisably a version of Manet's 'The Execution of the Emperor Maximilian'.

The war veteran's speech is taken from my translation into English of a passage from a pamphlet written by Cluseret in French, in which he records an acquaintance's eye-witness account of the murder of a peasant. As scripted, it proves a bit too much for our actor's English, so some of the more horribly graphic details are re-translated into French, and given to Jackie to sing in an unaccompanied declamatory solo. I find the cumulative effect of this series of transformations fascinating and powerful. The source of the discourse, the historical eye-witness, is absent; Cluseret, who recorded it, silent, though obviously the mastermind and orchestrator of its presentation; the fictional eye-witness comes across as so scarred by the events he is recalling that he cannot finish his account, which can only be told in full through the intervention of the Streetsinger's art.

I'm drafted into extra's costume: there's a shortage of older men, needed to pay court to the young beauties of the Second Empire's demi-monde. There's plenty of time to keep a diary when on the set, a lot of hanging around waiting while nothing seems to happen. It's hard to concentrate, focus one's attention, particularly when, as a writer in a medium that is importantly visual and kinetic, and in a production which has already been scripted in detail, one's participation is often not necessary.

Loss of concentration is infectious, spreading easily to those whose participation is essential in the vital moments when the camera is running. That's what it's all about: hours of apparent passivity and powerlessness, followed by a few moments of intense activity, when the whole crew unites in an attempt to control a sudden explosion of energy, make sure that none is dissipated, that it's all focused into those frames of film racing through the camera. An elaborate mechanism, in which every cog is vital, is constructed in those hours during which the take is choreographed and lit. It's not just actors who have cues, but perhaps half-a-dozen other people who can make or mar the take.

The fact that sometimes much of that energy and many of the meanings it generates are not in the full conscious awareness of those responsible makes focusing them and ensuring they cohere with meanings in other sequences all the more difficult. Much that was only implicit in the script may become explicit, and new meanings generated. Exactly the same happens during editing. I think that's why Ken wanted Terry and myself around during shooting, and was prepared to pay for our participation out of his own pocket: to help define and focus the new meanings that the production process and his imaginative responses to it threw up.

Sunday 7 May: Perhaps the high point of the shoot so far, the recording of the music and vocals for the film's two theatrical musical spectacles: 'Leda and the Swan' and 'To Berlin'. When we arrive at the studio, a few miles along the coast from Lisbon, Barrie and Simon are hard at work. Hearing the music for 'Leda' played by an orchestra for the first time is really exciting. I'd conceived the piece as a spoof of Offenbach, but at the same time a re-articulation of some basic themes of the film: power, money, sexual desire, a kind of voyeurism.

The music brings it all alive; the element of spoof remains, yet the piece now feels like good entertainment in its own right. 'To Berlin' sounds just as good, and the stars of Ramborde's theatre, Ana and Maria de Medeiros, give their all, as does Eduardo Viana in support. To follow the logic of the story, the singing should not be flawless in these numbers, but it does need to be good enough to do justice to the charm and energy of the music. I think they and Barrie bring it off.



The Versailles troops advance. Photo: Frank Connor.

Monday 8 May: I organise a little sick parade, taking John Lynch, whose eye has started to give him great pain, following an accident when dancing last week, and Jackie, who has suffered a badly cut knee, up to the production office.

Tuesday 9 May: Disaster! John has suffered damage to the retina of his eye. He is in great pain, and no one knows when he'll be able to work again.

Thursday 11 May: The insurance company doctor arrives from London to examine John. (In fact, after a few days off, John was able to continue, but it was a dreadful time for us all. Particularly, I guess, for Ken and for John himself.) It's also Barrie's last day with us. His music has been the bright spot of this dark and anxious period of the shoot. You'd hear technicians and extras humming it as they went off to eat. Ana proves magnificent in Séverine's first stage appearance, when Zeus comes down to woo her in the form of a swan. She manages to be graceful and erotic in her movements, while still conveying the elements of comedy and parody in the scene. Ken was subsequently often to request the music over the playback to help generate and focus mood and energy on the set.

Tuesday 16 May: We start on the scenes involving Le Vieillard. This character was one of our first inventions in the early days of scripting. He lives up in the flies of the theatre, where he is able to play host to unexpected guests such as Grafton, despatched there by the Prince of Wales and Séverine via the theatre machinery. He was originally conceived as an almost mystical Spirit of Revolution. However, now that Carlos Cesar, a Portuguese actor and director, has been cast, he is to be transformed into the Spirit of the Theatre. Though his scenes were origi-

nally tightly scripted, they need to be modified to conform to the new conception of the role, and to offer a Chorus-like comment on aspects of the action. Ken, Roshan, Carlos, Terry and I are all involved in this reworking, and everybody contributes something.

In fact, there seems to be no set pattern for rewrites. Sometimes we'll work like this, in a group. Sometimes Ken will work something out on his own with the actors. Sometimes he'll tell me or Terry what he wants, and send us away to write it. Even then, our role is not clearly defined; sometimes he's eager for our own creative contribution; other times, he'll expect us to do little more than transcribe word for word the lines he's proposed. Sometimes, lines or ideas that we thought had been abandoned months or years ago will re-emerge to take their place in the film.

Thursday 18 May: We're on location in Estremoz railway station, making use of a train borrowed from a museum. In this scene, Séverine, Maria and another colleague from the theatre see the results of the war-fever that Ramborde cashed in on with his patriotic production *To Berlin* in which they starred. The wounded and defeated French soldiers are returning from the war. I propose we consider a passage from Hugo's *Les Misérables* as a choric voice-over: 'All the acts of armies, unless they be wars of liberation, are committed under compulsion. *Passive obedience* is the keynote. An army is a strange contrivance in which power is the sum of a vast total of impotence. That is the explanation of war, an outrage by humanity upon humanity in despite of humanity.'

I think there can be great beauty and power to such choric commentaries, if used sparingly and in the right place. This, for me, was one of the strengths of *Zina*.

Saturday 20 May: Ken asks me to chat to Antonio C. Pires and Marcello Urghege about their parts. Antonio is to play the Prosecutor at the trial of Cluseret, and Marcello the man who interrupts the trial to report that Versailles troops have entered the city. This is the beginning of the end for the Commune. Jules Vallès, who presided over the trial, describes the blanket of silence that fell over the assembly at this moment: 'It lasted long enough for each of us to make his farewell to life. It seemed to me that all my blood descended into the earth . . . I saw myself covered with mud . . . It was my pride that choked. Defeated! Killed! Before achieving anything!'

For me, subjectively, the true drama of the trial is in this premonition of death and defeat. For Ken, however, the trial is an opportunity to engage with the Terror and the purges, with the idea of a revolution devouring its own children and leaders. There is no doubt such forces were at work in the Commune, even among the leadership (Félix Pyat, for example). They did lead to the arrest of Cluseret, on what were effectively trumped-up charges, though both Vallès and the prosecutor were sympathetic to him, and to the ultimate execution, as a reprisal, of the Archbishop of Paris and other hostages, who had originally been taken in the hope of an exchange for the unjustly imprisoned Blanqui, himself little better than a hostage in the hands of the Versailles government. Nevertheless, timidity and complacency rather than revolutionary excess seem to have been the fatal flaw of the Commune leadership.

Though we've agreed that the scene as scripted needs to be shortened, there has been no chance to talk our insights through, and we now have clear yet antagonistic conceptions of the scene, so what I say to the actors turns out to be totally misleading. Moreover, we're

shooting in a room that has been partitioned for a chamber-theatre production, leaving Ken much less space to choreograph the scene than he expected. He obviously has no energy to engage in a discussion challenging his conception.

Visually, he is working from a reactionary caricature of the proceedings of the meetings of the Commune (writing now after 14 July 1989, I can describe it as a truly Thatcherite image of revolutionary chaos and excess!). Of course, Ken is right to want to give the trial dramatic and visual impact. He's also right to confront the violence and repression that recurs, historically, in the revolutionary process. Perhaps, given our screenplay's tight construction and necessary focus on our central characters, this is the only way it can be done. I'd long been unhappy that we'd ignored the fate of the hostages.

But I'm equally unhappy to ignore the witness of Vallès concerning the conclusion of the trial: 'Time to show to history that calm had not deserted our souls at the news of this defeat . . . It seemed to me that it was good to finish on a word of justice, to appear to forget all the danger so as not to delay a verdict on which depended the honour and existence of a man.' I'd like us to celebrate the dignity of this instance of revolutionary justice, and am worried that we may be drawing on the visual iconography of the Commune's enemies without undermining or rebutting it.

Thursday 25 May: Gaila arrives around supertime. I haven't seen her for nearly a month, and I've been counting the days. We've been working on the end of the film, but there have been problems with the special effects. O'Brien shoots Grafton in revenge for his failure to save Séverine from execution. Unfortunately, the charge in Grafton's waistcoat fails to go off during the take, so there's no blood, and no sign of Grafton being hit by a bullet. Then,

perversely, the charge does explode when it's being checked out after the take, ruining Grafton's costume. When eventually he has been re-costumed and wired up again, we know there will be only one chance to get the shot: we're running out of time and replacement costumes.

John and Roshan play the scene with great power and concentration. There is not time, however, to attempt the final scheduled shot, which was to end the film. As the stuntman, Nick Gillard, has to leave tomorrow, someone is going to have to come up with a new ending.

In fact, this may not be the disaster it seems. We have always been reluctant to kill O'Brien at the end of the film. It has too much of the moral code of 40s and 50s cinema about it: the 'flawed' hero gets his 'just' deserts. On the other hand, it could have been visually spectacular: O'Brien, shot by the police, tearing apart the canvas of a vast cyclorama painting of Paris in his death fall.

Earlier, Ken decided to expand the confrontation between the two men before the shooting with a speech in which Grafton reveals a kind of madness, a total denial of guilt for the carnage of the suppression of the Commune and the death of Séverine. This text, again, is something we generate together, idea by idea, phrase by phrase. Here, the writer's role is not so much to provide all the lines, as to make sure that, once a good one is thrown up, often by the actor, we don't lose it, and find a way to integrate it into the speech.

Saturday 27 May: We're filming the last production number of the now radicalised theatre company. The company is on stage, rehearsing, just before the Versailles troops storm in. Over the last three years, we've experimented with the idea of writing another original show; of using songs from the period, like 'La Canaille' or the Commune ver-

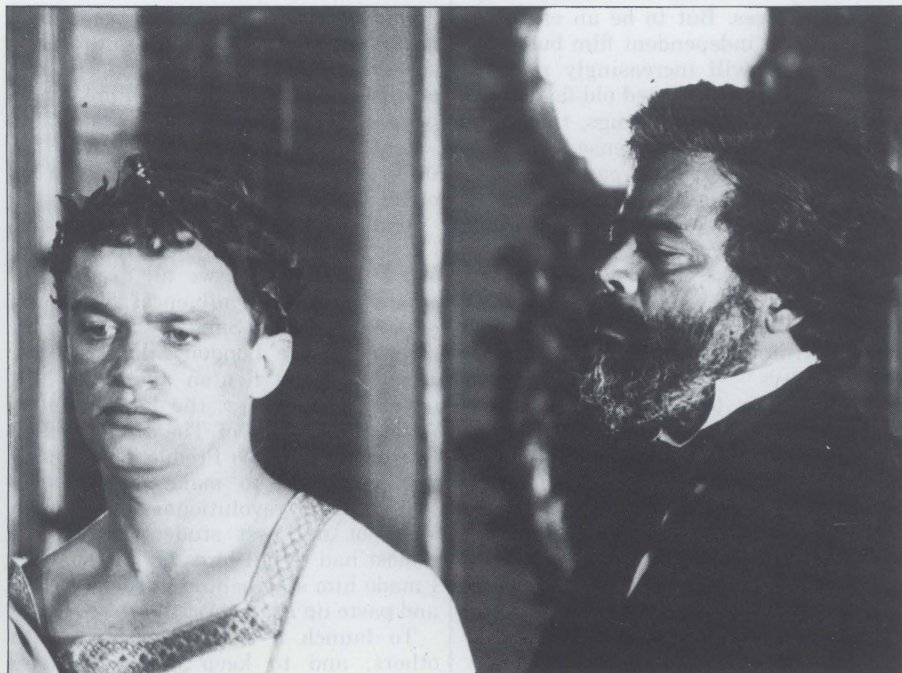
sion of 'La Marseillaise'. It was only in January that Ken hit on the idea of using the 'Internationale'. It connects to the future, and the history of the twentieth century. It was written during the Commune by someone who was politically active at the time. It employs the vocal talents of our company. It's a good tune! Of course, in just a few days our choice was given a terrible poignancy by the reports of the Chinese students who sang the 'Internationale' shortly before the massacre in Tiananmen Square.

Tuesday 30 May: The last day of shooting in the theatre. Gallifet has ridden his horse on to the stage, and is ordering the execution of various members of the company whose looks are not to his liking. Ken incorporates new lines, indicating forcefully the difference between the actors' weapons, which are only 'of the theatre', and those of the government troops. Alexandre is magnificent, but several of the special effects misfire. First, one of the extras, in the execution squad, has to be taken to hospital with powder burns. Then Ana is hit and badly bruised by the charge exploded when one of her fellows in the company is shot. Brave and professional, she flinches in pain, but continues to act in character until the end of the take. (The result turns out to look spectacular, as if she expected to die in this volley of shots, and is flinching in anticipation of the bullet, and in empathy with her comrades.) We don't finish shooting until well into Wednesday morning, and the last several hours are a time of great tension and anxiety. Later in the day we leave for Lisbon.

Sunday 4 June: A wonderful restful day with an old prep school and Cambridge friend whom I haven't seen for over twenty years: Martin Page. In fact, I think it was Martin who commissioned my first ever piece of film criticism, when he was Arts Editor of *Varsity*. Maria and Med Hondo arrive from Paris in the afternoon. Maria has been away for nearly two weeks, on another job. Med is to play Karl Marx. When I first met him in London, he told me how, when there was a season of his films in China, the Chinese thought that his picture on the poster was one of Marx. On a more serious level, my suggestion that he be cast in this role is an acknowledgment of my intellectual debt to African film-makers.

Friday 9 June: Another night shoot, which ends around dawn on Saturday morning. The last barricade has fallen, the last Communard been shot; Cluseret has saved O'Brien from sacrificing his life in a hopeless struggle against superior forces, in order to fight again another day. Some of us leave for home early Saturday afternoon. Others are booked to stay on for the final unit party. Now for the editing, as Bill Diver and his moviola prepare to take over from Elso Roque (director of photography) and the bull-crane. ■

Napoleon III (Dominique Pinon) and Karl Marx (Med Hondo). Photo: James Leahy.



FRAMEWORK *to* MAINFRAME

TWO CAREERS IN AND AROUND THE MOVIES
AND A POSTSCRIPT . . . JOHN PYM

DON RANVAUD, BEN GIBSON
AND JO IMESON ALL WORKED
IN VARIOUS CAPACITIES ON
THE EARLY ISSUES OF THE
RADICAL FILM MAGAZINE
FRAMEWORK. IN DUE COURSE,
THEY AND THE MAGAZINE
PARTED COMPANY—ISSUE 20
WAS THE LAST WITH WHICH
RANVAUD WAS ASSOCIATED.
FRAMEWORK CONTINUES TO
PUBLISH, NOW UNDER THE
AUSPICES OF SANKOFA, THE
BLACK FILM AND VIDEO
COLLECTIVE.

DON RANVAUD

Don Ranvaud, one of the founders in 1975 of *Framework*, then a small, interventionist film magazine out of the University of Warwick, is—or has been—a teacher; a documentarist (films on advertising in Turkey, the Virgin empire, Alexandro Jodorowsky); a jobbing journalist (in Italian, English, French and Portuguese); a long-time festival adviser, organiser and fixer; a writer (a hefty book of interviews with Bertolucci, some ten years in the making, and an upcoming history of modern Brazilian cinema); a features producer (films this year at Cannes and Venice); and, most recently, the editor (veterinarian) of the European Script Fund.

I was born, after an emergency landing, on a military airfield near Florence in December 1953. My mother was carrying the family wealth, in the form of jewels, sewn into her clothes. My father was English, my mother Italian. The family was travelling from Brazil—

where my father was a sometime production executive in the movies—via Italy to England. His dream was to get us back “home”, but the circumstances of my arrival interrupted this. My childhood was spent in Milan and Florence: my father always spoke English, “the future”; my mother spoke Italian, “the present”; and my grandmother, as a reminder of another strand of our ancestry, spoke French, “the past”. My older brother Ronald, who is now head of the Brazilian space programme, grew up in South America and seemed strangely unwilling to speak anything but Portuguese. Languages—although never really a problem—have always been something of a jumble for me.

In the 90s, the Decade of Europe, ‘mini-bucks’ cinema will more than ever perhaps require practitioners who can pick up and put down, who can criss-cross frontiers and haggle unself-consciously in whatever country they find themselves. But to be an effective player in the independent film business requires and will increasingly require something more—a tested old-fashioned faith in, among other things, the ideal of personal visions; a sense of what should rather than what can be made. Ranvaud was educated from the age of 12 at a Roman Catholic public school in Leicestershire. I was taught by Rosminian monks, in black habits. It was a liberal order, established, I came to appreciate, by a great secular philosopher, Antonio Rosmini: these were the good guys.

He went on to study Comparative Literature at Warwick, his unpublished thesis being on Pasolini and Robbe-Grillet. At university, Ranvaud, who has never been happy doing less than five things at the same time, regularly took time out to write for the independent Milanese newspaper *Il Giornale Nuovo*. I deliberately covered “black news”, real stories, crime and the courts (this was the dawn of the Red Brigades),

rather than the soft option of the arts—that came later.’ In 1974 he accepted a temporary lectureship in the Italian department at Warwick; remaining there until 1978, when he joined Charles Barr and Thomas Elsaesser to teach Film Studies at the University of East Anglia. ‘I absorbed almost nothing as a student,’ he said recently. ‘I began to learn when I began to teach—and when I saw that everyone in my first class was older than me.’

It was with *Framework*, though, that he put down a marker; and what followed was a multi-faceted career in the cinema as, it might be put, an enabler. The magazine’s first issue, a collective enterprise sponsored by the students’ union, was stencilled and cost £200 to produce, the local Arts Association chipping in with £30. (Subsequent issues received a regular grant from the British Film Institute.) ‘We pitched ourselves between the enthusiasm of *Movie* and the rigour of *Screen*. *Monogram* and *Cinema* were our predecessors. From the very beginning, the idea was to create a context for films which were not being seen in Britain, and when possible to show them at the university or at such places as the ICA or the Other Cinema.’

Warwick fizzed in the 70s: ‘Germaine Greer was teaching there, and Robin Wood—with whom we all disagreed—was a significant influence.’ Ranvaud’s students included Sheila Whitaker (now director of the London Film Festival), Rose de Wend Fenton and Lucy Neil (co-directors of *LIFT*, the London International Festival of Theatre) and Ben Gibson (head of BFI Production). ‘One of my ploys was to make my students learn Italian revolutionary songs. Ben was not my best student: in fact, I almost had to fail him. As punishment, I made him stay behind in the evenings and paste up *Framework*.’

To launch a small magazine, with others, and to keep it afloat is an

accomplishment for which you are usually remembered. It usually pays dividends, too, if not directly. In Ranvaud's case, *Framework* propelled him into a series of alliances with the sidebar events of several international film festivals; the self-sustaining, worldwide network of independent avant-garde cinema magazines; a spectrum of filmmakers; and the new phenomenon of the TV media programme. 'I have never had a "career": if I have achieved anything, it is, perhaps, to have done what I wanted to do and to have made myself available, in whatever capacity seemed, at a given moment, most useful.'

He suggested films for the National Library of Australia in Canberra, then tracked prints and ordered and checked subtitles. He systematically videotaped scores of film festival seminars and personality interviews. For RAI 1's 'Immagina' series he has made programmes on Richard Eyre's National Theatre and Andrew Lloyd Webber's phantoms. Not to mention a series of shoestring documentary portraits, beginning with one on Jean-Luc Godard devised on the spur of the moment following a *Framework* interview conducted by Peter Wollen.

For several years, Ranvaud ran a bookstall at the Berlin festival, and on one memorable occasion, in 1982, with Jon Jost and Tony Kirkhope, he suc-

ceeded in taking over the Market for open screenings of a selection of independent movies. Between times, he launched a second magazine, *Signs of Change*, 'a journal of literary theory, with lots of ideas and a short life (4 issues), self-financed and distributed.' And on top of this was a snowstorm of newspaper stories and magazine articles: his outlets stretching from Italy, through Hong Kong, to Brazil, and most points between. '*Framework* had an astonishing reach: its archive, for instance, contains stills from films no one else has bothered to preserve and complete runs of the sort of magazines most people in the film business never knew existed.'

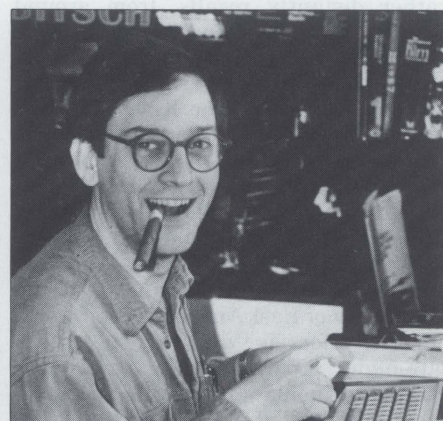
Why did he turn to producing feature films? 'I have not really advanced on to some higher plane: I continue to work with people I trust, my friends.' To date, he has helped set up *Comfort of Strangers* (script Harold Pinter; director Paul Schrader) and *Two Serious Ladies* (script Jane Bowles; director Sara Driver), as well as enabling two smaller pictures of his own. *Speaking Parts* (1989) is directed by Atom Egoyan, a Canadian born in Egypt to Armenian parents. It cost \$720,000, raised principally by a network of presales in Europe and Canada; and was shot in six weeks in Toronto. The synopsis begins, 'In a modern mausoleum, Clara contemplates

the video image of her dead brother . . . 'The Cannes audience was very positive.'

Visioni Private (Private Screenings) is an 'instant', cinema-on-cinema collective feature devised by Ranvaud with Francesco Calogero and Ninni Bruschetta and was shot over four days at the 1988 Taormina festival and ten days scattered through 1989. The players? 'Cyd Charisse has a role. You don't believe me, but it's true. I put up £6,000, everything I had. Even the lawyer in Pisa worked for nothing. At 9 a.m. I went to RAI 3 to show them the master, at 3 p.m. I came out with a contract for 100m lire, \$70,000 . . . On the recommendation of Guglielmo Biraghi, who was formerly the director of Taormina, it has been invited to the Critics' Week at Venice.'

BEN GIBSON

'Yes, he did make me sing "Avanti Popolo" . . . ' Ben Gibson, who was born in 1958, was raised from the age of nine in Islington, North London. His parents, both teachers, separated when he was six: in neither household was there a television. Ben, who lived with his father, was educated at a Roman Catholic primary school and then at the City of London School, where among his masters was the critic and novelist



Above: Don Ranvaud.
Left: Gabrielle Rose in
Atom Egoyan's *Speaking Parts*.



Above: Ben Gibson
with BFI 'New Directors'.
Left: Sogo Ishii's *Crazy Family*,
released by the Other Cinema.

Jonathan Keates. Taken seriously if not pedagogically, family cinema-going ranged from *The General* to Jancsó and the Bergman catalogue. Sergio Leone's spaghetti Westerns were forbidden pleasures which he discovered for himself. Young Gibson's haunts in the 70s were the Rex, Islington, the Electric, Notting Hill, and the Odeon, Dalston. 'I saw an awful lot of *Carry Ons*. But a film that really sticks in my mind? Wajda's *Everything for Sale*.'

At Warwick, however, which Gibson attended between 1976 and 79, it was the stage which principally occupied him. 'There was a division between the populists (*Butley* and Joe Orton) and the café intellectuals (Brecht and Weiss). I directed productions of *Puntilla* and *The Lower Depths*, and I appeared as the Director in James Saunders' *Next Time I'll Sing to You*.' Weak green-room culture did not appeal; epic theatre did. Why? 'One year we toured in Portugal with a production of David Hare's *Fanshen* with a hastily gathered group called "Theatre of the Eleventh Hour". That really taught me something: performing in English a British play about collectivisation in China—with a Portuguese translation of the Brechtian captions—at a collective farm in a European country only just free of dictatorship. Sobering.'

Gibson was drawn to *Framework*, he rather distantly recalls, from around No 6, 'the *Casanova* issue'. 'The Hitchcock dossier and the *Superman II* issue I clearly remember. I was first put on to book reviews: the Katz and Roud dictionaries, and Jonathan Rosenbaum's reminiscences which, I regret to say, I self-indulgently lambasted. I later met Rosenbaum at the Collective for Living Cinema in New York: and that, I guess, was another lesson.' After Warwick, and before enrolling for an MA at the University of East Anglia, Gibson worked briefly for LIFT and then became a late-night programmer at the Paris Pullman cinema in West London. He later went to the United States for seven months in order to complete his thesis on British Cinema in the 40s; during the day he was employed as a British butler, 'a true nightmare'.

Gibson's connections with *Framework* had briefly brought him face to face with the realities of zero-budget filmmaking: Ranvaud's never-ending Raul Ruiz documentary ('on one occasion in Portugal, a well-known German director turned up to announce to Ruiz, "This is the stock for my film, not yours . . .")'; and the spur-of-the-moment *Godard 80*, directed by Ranvaud and Jon Jost ('Godard very tellingly debunked the notion that there are some artists capable of talking about their work'). It was, however, chiefly as a distributor for the Other Cinema, and later as an exhibitor at the Metro cinema off Piccadilly, that Gibson learned the film business proper. He joined the Other Cinema—on whose IBM Selectric *Framework* had for a time been set—in March 1982, 'towards the end of their collective period'.

What films was he most pleased to have promoted from that period? 'Chantal Akerman's *Toute une Nuit*, Rosa von Praunheim's *City of Lost Souls*, Ruiz's *City of Pirates*. We always had cashflow problems: we could never guarantee anything bigger than the ICA. One of the Other Cinema's successes, though, was *Taxi zum Klo*, which played and played at the Screen on the Hill. The question one asked, when trying to gauge how much to offer for a theatrical advance, was how much is the TV sale worth? Our first offers were sometimes, as with *Sunless*, considered an insult by the producer. The £6,500 the Metro spent on promoting *Hail, Mary* was more than I had ever spent to promote anything.' Today, the feature and documentary backlist of the Other Cinema (now Metro Pictures)—as valuable as the *Framework* archive—provides steady VHS sales to educational outlets.

The Metro, which opened in October 1985, and represents one of the GLC's last acts of defiance, 'learned all its lessons' from the Other Cinema, the moviehouse linked to the OC distribution company, which operated between 1976 and 78 when its Tottenham Street premises were taken over by Channel 4. The Other Cinema, as distributor, deliberately held such films as *Peppermint Freedom*, *Crazy Family* and *Before Stonewall* for the new cinema. 'Tony Kirkhope and I, who ran the Metro, were committed to engaged generic cinema. We were offered *Subway*, a movie I felt was vacuous and against which, as a run-on, I vehemently argued. Here we are, it would have announced, we're open and we'll show any old . . . anything that takes money. The most useful lesson I personally learnt from the Metro and the Other Cinema, I think, was cautious credit control.'

In 1987, Gibson became the British Film Institute's video production officer. 'It seemed a place where things would get done. I was looking for a change and I had contemplated film school.' His principal task—another job of enablement—was to pilot the BFI's 'New Directors' short-film scheme. Some 450 scripts are submitted each year, of which seven or eight are made. 'It's a sensible testing ground. We don't say, Here's a pittance, go and make a pittance film; but rather, Here's a £40,000 film, we have £25,000, which £25,000-worth of it do we want to make?'

Earlier this year, aged 30, Gibson was appointed Colin McCabe's successor as head of BFI Production. At the time we spoke, he was tactfully cautious about his plans. 'What new BFI picture would I happily pay money to see? Lots. Try this one: black and white; cost £700,000; a thriller, maybe, which critics probably say is 15 minutes too long; directed by a British Léos Carax. The point in both distribution and production, I believe, is to be able to identify your audience while pursuing whatever noble ambitions you may have—rather than being "correct" and going down in a blaze of glory.'

JO IMESON

For a brief period in the late 70s, Ben Gibson shared a house in North London with his former singing-master Don Ranvaud and a contemporary from their Warwick days, Jo Imeson, who was then employed at the BFI on SIGHT AND SOUND's sister publication the *Monthly Film Bulletin*. The MFB's copy was in those distant days typed on Adler manuals and set in hot metal. Each synopsis, review and credit list was, in fact, frequently retyped: a formidable grind which, along with much else, fell chiefly to Jo Imeson. Her second job, in the evenings, was the management and co-ordination of *Framework*. Both magazines were, I suspect, a shade too small for her.

In due course, Jo Imeson departed for New York to take what to her colleagues seemed a dangerously exotic job dealing with 'new technology' matters for the author and publisher James Monaco. In 1982, Monaco set up Baseline, a pioneering on-line database servicing the film and television industry.



Jo Imeson.

Seven years later, it justly claims to be the largest of its kind in the world. If they do not already own one, subscribers are presented with a portable computer which can be plugged in almost anywhere in the world and access gained to 750,000 pages of information. 'It is an extraordinary tool,' Ranvaud said, after a recent visit to the company headquarters, with its ranks of telephone researchers and updaters. 'If they would only lend me one of those Minitel computers, I could easily feed them yet more information from Europe . . .'

'Above- and below-line credits,' a Baseline flysheet reads, 'box-office grosses, celebrity and company contracts, information on film and TV projects in production and development, audience response and demographic data, industry news and analysis, the official Academy Award database, and pre-publication announcements of hot new literary properties.' Note the Baseline letterhead: Jo Imeson, Vice-President. From acorn-sized magazines . . .

Henry V

by William Shakespeare



Renaissance Films plc
in association with the BBC
and Curzon Film Distributors
present

Kenneth Branagh in Henry V_{PG} by William Shakespeare

with

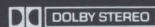
Brian Blessed
Richard Briers
Robbie Coltrane
Judi Dench
Ian Holm
Derek Jacobi
Geraldine McEwan
Michael Maloney
Paul Scofield
John Sessions
Robert Stephens
Emma Thompson
Michael Williams


Music by

Patrick Doyle
Performed by
City of Birmingham
Symphony Orchestra
Conducted by
Simon Rattle
Associate Producer
David Parfitt
Executive Producer
Stephen Evans
Produced by
Bruce Sharman
Directed by
Kenneth Branagh

Released by CURZON FILM DISTRIBUTORS

Distribution by HB HOBO FILM ENTERPRISES



Original Soundtrack Recording available on  Compact Disc and Cassette.

CURZON MAYFAIR
CURZON STREET, LONDON, W1.

01-499 3737 cc 01-867 1111 01-379 4444

Film at 2.30 5.45 8.30

NOW SHOWING

CURZON WEST END (until Nov 2)
SHAFTESBURY AVENUE, LONDON, W1.

01-439 4805 cc 01-867 1111 01-379 4444

Film at 2.30 6.00 8.45

ADVANCE BOOKING AVAILABLE



aki kaurismäki

GOES BUSINESS

W I L L I A M • F I S H E R

Sooner or later, each country gets the national cinema it deserves. These days in France they remake Marcel Pagnol films. The masters of the New German Cinema gave up film-making to direct at Bayreuth; now all that public money goes to films like *Didi—der Doppelgänger* and *Zwei Nasen Tanken Super*. The British have David Puttnam. The Italians have Adriano Celentano.

Since 1953, the Finns have had *The White Reindeer*—Erik Blomberg's saga about a woman who transforms herself at will into a deer. Mercifully, they have had little else. Until now. At 32 years of age, Aki Kaurismäki is riding the crest of a Finnish New Wave.

In seven years, Kaurismäki has made seven films which alternate in character between stoic realism and sophomoric humour. Mostly these films are about pug ugly, no-hope butchers and trash collectors whose bland lives in a Baltic

never-never land one day lurch out of control. But the films portray with equal conviction the boardroom intrigues of a rubber duck cartel and the exploits of a bunch of Finnish guys who never take off their Ray-Bans.

At his most parochial, Kaurismäki howlingly lampoons the Finnish instinct for self-destruction. At his most universal, he composes deadpan poetry about the will to escape from a lifetime of long nights, expensive alcohol and compulsory English lessons. 'I'm schizophrenic,' he admits. 'I go from making a serious picture to an off-the-wall one and back. I like both kinds of film-making. But with the latter, I can spend more time in the bar. Perhaps that's why there are fewer serious films.'

After stints as a postman and a dishwasher, Kaurismäki began his career as the screenwriter and leading man in *The Liar* (1980), a no-budget looseleaf

narrative about a would-be writer in Helsinki. It was also his brother Mika's diploma film at the Munich Hochschule für Fernsehen und Film. Although black and white and rough around the edges, this highly original effort caused a sensation in Finland thanks to Mika's light, deft touch and Aki's over-the-top performance.

'We were children at that time,' he recalls. 'I was twenty-three and Mika was twenty-five. We were much influenced by Godard and Truffaut. In fact, we stole shamelessly from them. I even imitated Jean-Pierre Léaud in my performance. Although *The Liar* didn't have an international audience, it changed everything here. It was like a Finnish *A Bout de Souffle*.'

Next Aki and Mika co-directed a documentary, *The Saimaa Gesture*, about a tour by three Finnish rock bands on a steamer around Lake



Left: *Leningrad Cowboys Go America*.

Above: *Crime and Punishment*: Markku Toikka.

Saimaa. 'Although we often work together, this was our only real collaboration as directors,' Aki says. 'It's possible to co-direct a documentary—especially when you are working with four cameras, as we were—but I don't think you can do so with a feature film.'

Although this is their only co-direction credit, Aki and Mika have frequently been tagged as 'the Kaurismäki brothers'—to their mutual detriment. For, in spite of obvious affinities, their films also differ sharply. Mika's films are more commercial in their appeal and just a bit sweet. Perhaps because of his training in Munich, he draws on such unlikely sources as the classic *Heimatfilm* (*The Clan*, his bucolic story of an outlaw family in Lapland) and the New German incarnation of the road movie (*Rosso and Helsinki Napoli All Night Long*). Often, however, these elements seem to have been forced uncomfortably into a Finnish setting. Most recently, Mika was approached by an American studio to remake *The White Reindeer*, with Richard Gere and Isabella Rossellini.

Aki made his own first picture in 1983: *Crime and Punishment*, a \$350,000 adaptation of the Dostoevsky novel, about a slaughterhouse worker in contemporary Helsinki. In it he had already hit his stylistic stride: the script is spare, the performances are disciplined and the camerawork (by Timo Salminen, Aki and Mika's regular director of photography) renders the dull Finnish capital luminous. Most of all, there is an unerring unity of vision to the whole.

'From the beginning, I have always made all the artistic choices myself,' says Kaurismäki. 'Timo does the lighting, but I frame the picture. I do my own editing, select the music and super-

vise the mix. I found my actors in a bar. They're all professionals, but people always wonder, because I never let them act. You see, many of them are from the theatre, where they are taught that the art of acting is shouting.'

For him, actors serve as talking props: they recite their lines, fill the space, submit unquestioningly to the priority of the *mise en scène*. Sometimes, however, the ultimate impact is far greater than anything possible through 'emotive' performance. In *Crime and Punishment*, the Raskolnikov character engages in a philosophical discussion with his victim before coolly dispatching him. Their monotone exchange (shot in a single long take) is set to the turgid accompaniment of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony, creating a complex, oddly heightened emotional effect.

Crime and Punishment was also Kaurismäki's first adaptation and updating of a classic. ('It's much easier to take someone else's book. It gives you more time to spend in the bar.') The film also displayed for the first time the streak of Lutheran puritanism that makes his otherwise warped stories unsettlingly chaste. 'There was a scene in *Crime and Punishment* where the man and woman take a walk on the beach and he puts his hand on her shoulder. But I found the moment too private, so I cut it. You know how the Yankee films are: two people in bed, practising gymnastics. I think they take care of the sex part of the cinema art very well, so I have no reason to show it.'

After *Crime and Punishment*, Kaurismäki's work immediately bounced off-the-wall in the form of *Calamari Union* (1985), a 'so-called film' in which several members of the said union (all named Frank) put on their

dark glasses and board the Helsinki subway in a bid to find a part of town where 'life isn't made unbearable by old ladies and dogs.' Some perish. Two escape to Estonia.

In his next film, *Shadows in Paradise* (1986), Kaurismäki discovered Matti Pellonpää, a dry, droll and tragic Finn who plays a dustman in love with a supermarket check-out girl. The centrepiece of the film is his epiphany in a crowded language laboratory while repeating a BBC English phrase: 'It's funny being in love. And it's fun, too.' The couple escapes to Estonia.

Kaurismäki describes his next film, *Hamlet Goes Business* (1987), as a 'black and white, underground B-movie classical drama.' Here he succeeded in blending the heavily ironic melodrama of *Crime and Punishment* and *Shadows in Paradise* with the lunacy of *Calamari Union* by adapting Shakespeare's play to a bloody power-struggle at the top of a Finnish family-run multinational company. 'Money offers resistance to capital like an animal to a butcher's knife,' Kaurismäki wrote cryptically in his notes to the film. 'Contains the truth about life in a typical Western "everything for sale" society. Some drama included.'

'The script was entirely improvised,' he now claims. 'Just like *Calamari Union*. I'd never read the play before. I'd go and read a page and do the scene.' The film is dark and thick with low-key lighting, eerily mannered performances, Dutch tilts. It is perhaps his most original film and probably his best. It cost an astounding \$100,000 to make.

He immediately followed it up with another melodrama, *Ariel* (1988), and has just released his latest off-the-wall picture, *Leningrad Cowboys Go America*. If properly handled by distributors,



Shadows in Paradise: Kati Outinen, Matti Pellonpää.

this film should make them and Kaurismäki filthy and rightfully rich. In it Kaurismäki recklessly combines genres (the backstage musical, the road movie) and half-witted clichés about East-West relations to tell the story of a Soviet family rock band (the real-life group Leningrad Cowboys) on tour in the United States. Sporting foot-long rockabilly forelocks, they drive about the country in an oversized Cadillac (with two in the boot) performing their repertoire of country 'n' western songs with lyrics about collective farming and animal husbandry on the steppes. On the road they gaze wistfully at photographs of tractors.

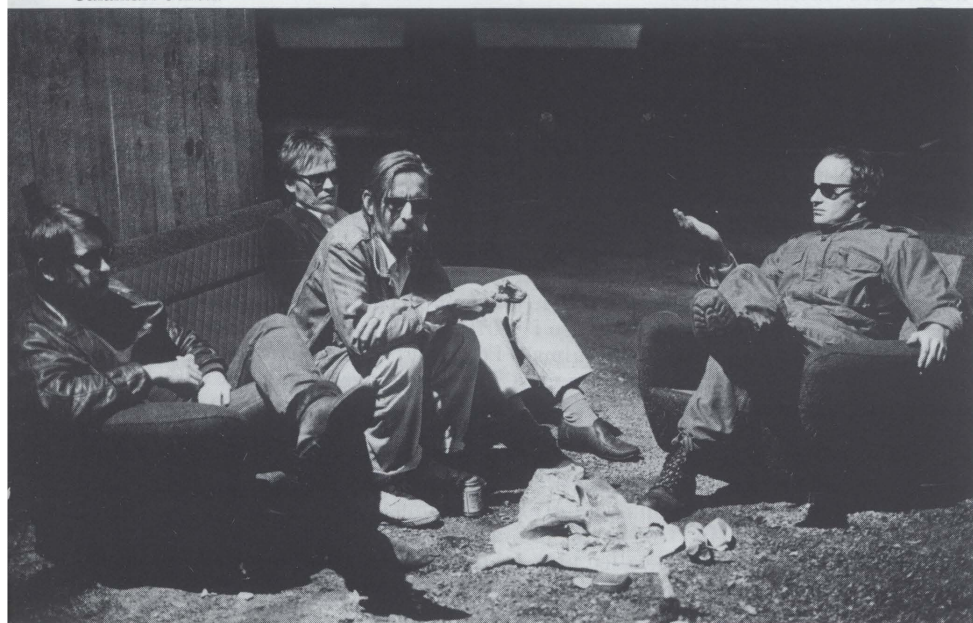
Following the group's wholesale brush-off in the United States, their despotic, beer-swilling manager (Matti Pellonpää once again) takes them to Mexico, where the Cowboys hit the top ten by playing at wedding receptions. During one reception, their dead bass player (who had been on ice throughout

the film together with Pellonpää's beer supply) is revived when some tequila drips on him. *Leningrad Cowboys Go America* is a seriously bent and utterly original piece of work.

'There was one man who came down to Helsinki from Lapland to see the film,' recalls Kaurismäki. 'He saw the 5pm show. Then he bought a ticket for the 7pm show, then the 9pm, then the 11pm. Then he went back to Lapland.'

Aki is currently working on three films. He has almost finished a picture called *Match Factory Girl*. And he is planning to shoot a film in London, to be called *I Hired a Contract Killer*, and another one in Paris. 'I've always wanted to make a film in the classic British studio style,' he says of *Contract Killer*. 'But I don't want to shoot it in a studio. This presents a serious challenge. The film is about a man who doesn't want to live, but he is too afraid to kill himself, so he hires a contract killer to do the job.'

Calamari Union.



'The film in France is *La Bohème*—not the opera, but the book on which it is based. I hate the opera. But the book is great. It's funny. It has nothing to do with art. I'm all set to go with both these. I already have the camera: I have Ingmar Bergman's old Arriflex. After *Fanny and Alexander*, he gave up making films so he sold his camera to me.'

To his credit, Kaurismäki doesn't have a pretentious bone in his body—which is ultimately what distinguishes him as a film-maker. In some quarters he is viewed—together with Jim Jarmusch—as a proletarian metaphysician in deep artistic hock to Wim Wenders. But Aki's films have none of the contrived quirkiness that mars Jarmusch's work, nor the occasionally overbearing earnestness and monotony of Wenders'. Kaurismäki's work also spontaneously recalls Fassbinder: the flirtation with 50s melodrama, the ability to transcend the regionalism of the material, the working methods and especially the prolific, protean output. But again Aki's films are more disciplined and more humorous than all but the best Fassbinder films.

All these lofty declarations Aki absolutely denies. To begin with, he claims never to have seen a Fassbinder film. As the biggest influences on his work, he cites Buñuel, Ozu and Bresson—in that order. 'I like Lubitsch films a lot as well. Among contemporary film-makers, I like Andi Engel, Joe Comerford and Idrissa Oudraogo.' Presumably, it is no coincidence that at the time he had just seen (and purchased for distribution in Finland) their films *Melancholia*, *Reefer* and *the Model* and *Yaaba*.

'The only living masters, however, don't work any more—Bresson and Alexander Mackendrick. I have nothing against the Finnish film-makers, but I never see their films. I know what they're like, of course. If I see one still from a Finnish film, I can tell you exactly what it's all about.'

His coolness toward his countrymen has not gone unnoted in Finland. In spite of the fact that he and Mika are both on the board of directors for the Midnight Sun Film Festival (the leading showcase for Finnish films), the brothers, and especially Aki, have been widely criticised in the local press and industry. Although Kaurismäki's pronounced disdain for his Finnish colleagues calls for rebuttal, sometimes they smack of sour grapes.

Aki once submitted a script for a subsidy from the Finnish Film Foundation. The last twenty-five pages were mysteriously absent. He appended a note explaining that his dog had eaten them. Kaurismäki received the grant. The Finnish Film Foundation, however, regretted that their cheque was for only half the promised amount; their dog had eaten the remainder. 'It was a dirty lie,' contends Kaurismäki. 'I am certain that their dog didn't really eat it.'

Every country may get the cinema it deserves, but it doesn't always necessarily deserve the cinema it gets. ■

Our new columnist, J. J. Hunsecker, suggests that most film critics could do with a good atlas and that no one would choose to be played by Elisha Cook.

IF IT'S MONDAY...

Compilers of movie reference books have always had fun with geographical errors in films. The most spectacular example occurs in the title of *Krakatoa, East of Java* when Krakatoa is actually west of Java. The underrated comedy Western *A Big Hand for the Little Lady* was retitled *Big Deal at Dodge City* by its British distributors, who were clearly more interested in alliteration than the fact that it is set in Laredo.

Anyone reading the June issue of the *Monthly Film Bulletin* ought to have noticed that such mistakes are not confined to movie-makers. It was not necessary to look further than the first sentence of the first review. Tom Milne's plot summary of John Carpenter's disappointing new movie *They Live* (which I hope will one day be shown in a double-bill with *It's Alive*) began: 'Heading south from Colorado in the sudden recession that has closed banks and factories all over America, Nada finds work as a labourer in San Francisco.' In fact, heading south from Colorado on a journey to San Francisco is about as useful as heading east from Java to Krakatoa. However, it would defer the disappointment of arriving in San Francisco and discovering that it looks distressingly unlike the city in *They Live*, which is in fact clearly Los Angeles. (However, if John Carpenter were to complain, Tom Milne could always reply that his *Assault on Precinct 13* takes place entirely and bafflingly in Precinct 9.)

A confusion between the two major cities on the Western seaboard is not confined to Tom Milne. He is merely treading in the misleading footsteps of the celebrated critic David Thomson. In his book *Movie Man*, Thomson devotes a whole chapter to the subject of 'Place and Location'. He gives particular emphasis to Joseph Losey's work: 'Losey was one of the first American directors to photograph an urban civilisation that was recognisably contemporary. His version of *M* has the provable basis of San Francisco, whereas Lang's city in his earlier version is constructed for the movie, the streets as artificial as the interiors. And as in Losey's *M* the steep diagonals of San Francisco are repeated in the interiors in the staircases and ramps against which...'

Hold it right there! Provable basis or not, Losey's *M* was set in Los Angeles. The assumption, perhaps, is that any West Coast city with sloping streets must be San Francisco. Similarly, when Nigel Andrews described (in his review in the *Financial Times*) Costa-Gavras' *Betrayed* as being set in the Deep South (rather than its true location the Midwest), he must have assumed that films about the Ku Klux Klan are *always* set in the Deep South. Clearly the ideal present for the film critic who appears to have everything is a reliable atlas.

Incidentally, the spotting of mistakes has become something of a pastime for movie buffs, so it may be time to expose one mistaken mistake that has already appeared in two books, John H. Irving's *Killjoy's Book of the Cinema* and the

recently published *Movie Clips* by Patrick Robertson. The supposed mistake is described by Irving as an 'all-time classic'. In his words: 'While Miss Garland was singing "The Trolley Song", a friend of hers walked on to the set behind the camera and, thinking this was just a dress rehearsal, shouted, "Hi, Judy!"' Apart from a slight glimmer of concern, the interruption barely registered on her face and she carried on singing. Indeed, so good was her cover-up that the scene has been left in the picture as it stands, "Hi, Judy!" and all.'

Hunsecker took the trouble to listen to the sequence to confirm that no 'Hi, Judy!' was audible, but the effort was unnecessary. Since the soundtracks of song sequences in Hollywood movies were pre-recorded, interlopers on the soundstage were free to say what they liked.

LAUGHTER IN THE DARK

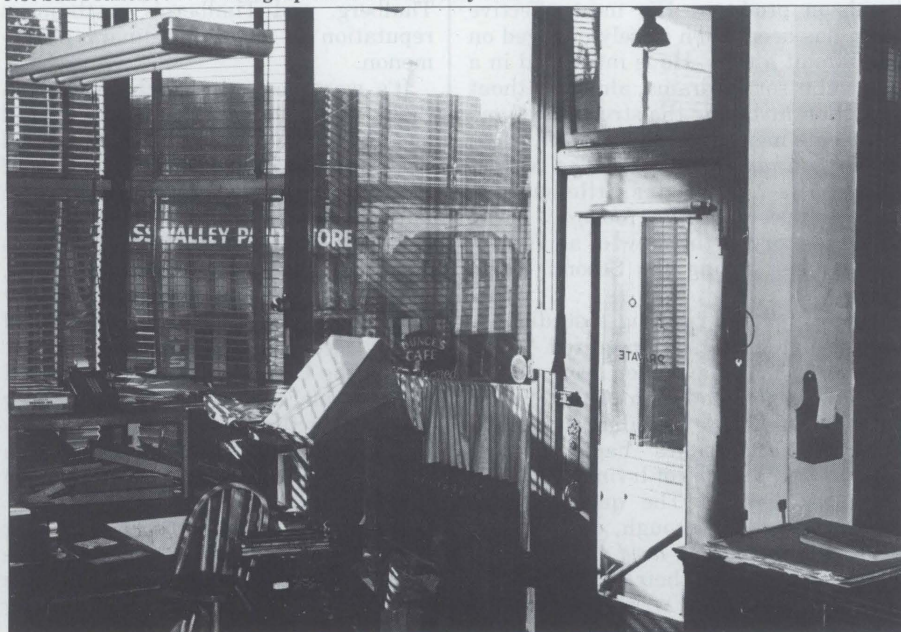
On the subject of critics, Victoria Mather, the film critic of the *Daily Telegraph*, recently initiated a campaign to prevent people gatecrashing the weekly press screenings for the movie critics of national papers. Details of venues were removed from schedules and the normal critic's week took on something of the excitement of orienteering. But despite all the efforts of the campaign, the only noticeable disappearance was that of Ms Mather herself, a casualty of the night of the long knives during the merging of the *Daily* and *Sunday Telegraph*.

Press shows are an odd phenomenon and a problem to which film companies should possibly accord more attention. It is a well-known conviction in the movie business that specially arranged previews are of dubious value when gauging the reaction to a film. The real test comes when you put the film on in front of 'hot bodies', that is, people who have invested real money in their evening's entertainment.

The bodies at press shows are as cold as you'll find anywhere except on a marble slab. This may not matter too much with serious dramas, but the effect on comedies can be disastrous. Have you ever wondered why the classic Marx Brothers movies seem so disappointing when you watch them on TV, so much less funny than when you saw them years ago in the cinema? It may be that you no longer find them funny. A more likely reason is that these films were edited to leave room for audience laughter. Watched at home alone they start to seem sluggish.

In his fascinating book *When the Shooting Stops*, the editor Ralph Rosenblum describes his work on the famous scene in *Annie Hall* when Woody Allen sneezes over a snuffbox full of cocaine, scattering it into the air. Preview audiences laughed so much that they obscured the first line of

Not San Francisco... Photograph of a set for Losey's *M*.



dialogue in the following scene, so Rosenblum had to keep putting more and more footage back (showing the reaction to Allen's sneeze) to give space for it. Again, when watched on video the moment seems slow and clumsy.

The effect can plausibly be traced in the varying reactions to Pedro Almodóvar's *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*. The critical reaction was uniformly hostile and several reviews even referred to the tomb-like silence of the press show. But Hunsecker's straw poll of hot bodies found that 100 per cent of paying customers roared with laughter throughout the film. The lesson for the film companies might well be at least to avoid screening comedies in the smaller viewing theatres. And critics who want to gauge a genuine response might even consider venturing into the uncharted territory of a real-life public screening. Incidentally, the best film critic in the world, Pauline Kael, doesn't go to press shows at all.

THE WHOLE EQUATION

David Puttnam's attempt, as head of production at Columbia Pictures, to save Hollywood from itself always seemed more like a treatment for one of his own films than a plausible strategy for survival at the top. But at the time of his enforced departure in September 1987, it was impossible to assess his success or failure. The jury was still out, necessarily, because none of his films had been released. Two years on, however, and with the help of Andrew Yule's recent biography of Puttnam, *Enigma: The Story So Far*, we can begin to assess his Hollywood legacy. It makes grim reading.

The three most successful films Puttnam had dealings with during his reign were Norman Jewison's *Moonstruck* and the sequels to *Karate Kid* and *Ghostbusters*. Unfortunately, the connection is that all three were projects that Puttnam personally lost for Columbia in different ways. Most unfortunate of all was the case of *Ghostbusters*, which Puttnam lost in one careless off-the-cuff sentence attacking Bill Murray in an otherwise harmless speech.

Of the films which Columbia did produce, not one has become a substantial money-maker. However, with *La Bamba*, well into production when he arrived, Puttnam did encourage the shrewd and, as it turned out, lucrative tactic of simultaneously releasing English- and Spanish-language versions. Spike Lee's very poor second film, *School Daze*, made some money (costing \$5.5m, grossing \$14m). *The Last Emperor* and *Hope and Glory*, both taken up by Puttnam at a late stage, were profitable.

Most of the other films lost money, some catastrophically. *Leonard Part VI*, the vehicle for the biggest tv star in

America, Bill Cosby, managed to be more of a disaster than Columbia's previous major disaster, *Ishtar*. *Little Nikita*, for which Puttnam selected Sidney Poitier instead of Jack Nicholson, cost \$15m and grossed \$1.7m. His long-nurtured project of adapting William Boyd's novel *Stars and Bars* cost \$8m and grossed \$100,000. *Zelly and Me*, a ludicrous Southern melodrama starring Isabella Rossellini and, believe it or not, David Lynch, cost only \$2.3m, but then it grossed only \$55,000. Andrew Yule rhetorically pondered the fortunes of Terry Gilliam's *Baron Munchausen* that then lay in the future: 'Will the teller of tall tales ride to the rescue of Puttnam's beleaguered slate? Only time will tell.' The image of riding to the rescue of a slate sounds implausible and indeed time did tell, firmly in the negative.

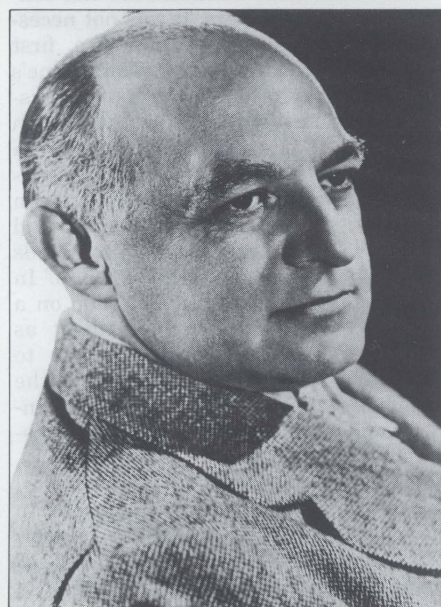
But it's unfair to assess Puttnam in purely financial terms, not least because his successor had no particular wish to promote Puttnam films when they finally hit the market. Puttnam perhaps used his power best not in initiating projects but in rescuing those of other people that had run into trouble, like Bill Forsyth's *Housekeeping* and Jim McBride's *The Big Easy*.

The real problem was with the projects for which he was more responsible. *Roxanne* was a thoroughly honourable financial failure and *Someone to Watch Over Me* a merely disappointing Ridley Scott thriller. But *Leonard Part VI*, *School Daze*, *Zelly and Me*, *Vice Versa*, *Punchline*, *A Time of Destiny*, *To Kill a Priest* varied across a spectrum that went from bad to disastrous.

Leonard Part VI, *Little Nikita* and *Zelly and Me* have to date not been commercially distributed in British cinemas. *The Old Gringo*, a major film starring Jane Fonda and Gregory Peck, had trouble being released at all and is only reaching our screens this autumn.

David Puttnam is a particular kind of hands-on producer. His most effective work has been when closely engaged on one film at a time. He is interested in a particular sort of drama, almost without exception involving the struggles of and between men. Think of *Midnight Express*, *Chariots of Fire*, *The Killing Fields*, *The Mission*. It's little surprise that his upcoming film, *Memphis Belle*, tells the story of the crew of an American bomber during the Second World War.

For a producer running a studio, entirely different gifts are required. 'Not a half dozen men have ever been able to keep the whole equation of pictures in their heads,' says Cecilia Brady, in F. Scott Fitzgerald's hagiographical fictionalised portrait of Irving Thalberg, *The Last Tycoon*. The question that could be asked, though, is whether heads of production need to keep the whole equation in their heads. Lillian Hellman has already written well about the absurdity of Fitzgerald's idolising of



Irving Thalberg (top) and Harry Cohn.

Thalberg, and Thalberg's posthumous reputation is an extraordinary phenomenon.

It's worth comparing Thalberg with that most despised of Hollywood moguls, and a predecessor of David Puttnam at Columbia, Harry Cohn. If Thalberg wasn't exactly an intellectual himself, he knew how to flatter them. He knew how to say the right things about the film craft. Cohn, by contrast, claimed to assess films according to how much his ass twitched as he watched them. He talked of his films being spat out by the Columbia production line: 'I run this place on the basis of making one good picture a year. I'll lay everything on the line for that one . . . The rest of the time I just have to keep spitting out.'

The films tell another story. Thalberg is remembered for some remarkable movies: Chaney's *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, Tod Browning's *Freaks*, King Vidor's *The Crowd*, *Camille*, the 1935

DOUBLE TAKES

Mutiny on the Bounty. But compare them with this list of Cohn movies (and one could easily choose two or three as many of a similar standard): *It Happened One Night*, *Only Angels Have Wings*, *His Girl Friday*, *Gilda*, *Lady from Shanghai*, *In a Lonely Place*, *The Big Heat*, *The Man from Laramie*, *3.10 to Yuma* and *Anatomy of a Murder*. These would form a respectable list of the best American films ever made.

Irving Thalberg lauded geniuses while thwarting them: he vandalised Stroheim's *Greed* and castrated the Marx Brothers. Cohn endlessly complained about his temperamental artists but on occasion he would give them extraordinary creative freedom. Yet Thalberg died as Hollywood's most celebrated martyr, while it was of Cohn's funeral that Red Skelton said: 'Well, it only proves what they always say—give the public what they want to see, and they'll come out for it.' At least David Puttnam got out alive.

WHO PLAYED...?

Imagine if *All the President's Men* had starred J. T. Walsh and Jack Nicholson instead of Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman. Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein are currently in the extraordinary position of having been played on screen twice, once together in the basically accurate account of their Watergate investigation, once apart in varying fictionalised versions. In Nora Ephron's novel *Heartburn*, the portrait of her husband Carl Bernstein was self-evident. By the time the character reached the screen, legal and artistic considerations, and Jack Nicholson, had added a heavy disguise.

There's a party game in which you choose which actor you would like to play you. About 99 per cent of men start with Robert Redford, but it is a fair

estimate that precisely 0 per cent would choose the rather creepy J. T. Walsh. But then they had some trouble getting people to be in *Wired* (and considerably more getting anyone to show it when it was made). It's difficult to believe that Woodward sanctioned the choice of Walsh and impossible to conceive that he approved the fantasy sequence in which Walsh's Woodward interrogates the dying Belushi.

People with any sense—and sufficient power—have strictly controlled the choice of actors to portray them. Cole Porter shrewdly insisted that Cary Grant play him in *Night and Day*. President Kennedy personally approved Cliff Robertson to play Young Mr Kennedy in *PT 109*. No James Cagney biopic has yet been made, but Cagney himself announced shortly before he died that he would like to be portrayed by Michael J. Fox.

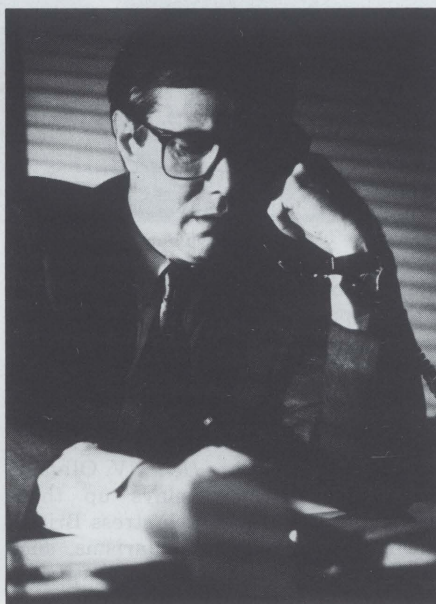
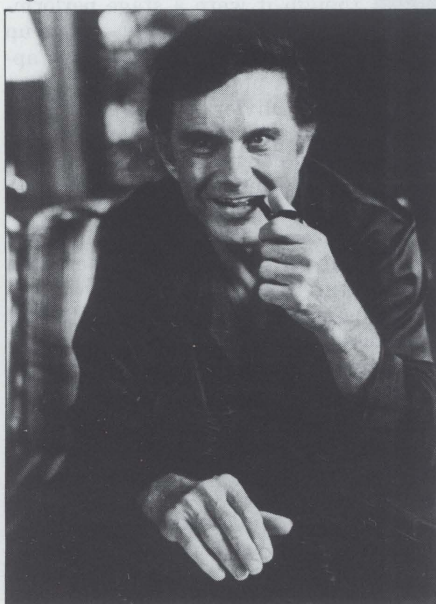
Portrayal can also be a form of character assassination. The most devastating attack ever made on Hugh Hefner was when Cliff Robertson portrayed him as a fading, pyjamaed absurdity in *Star 80*. There are some actors that no one would want to be portrayed by. Elisha Cook is one. And John Lahr's heart must have sunk when he learnt that he was to be played by Wallace Shawn in *Prick Up Your Ears*, a wickedly cruel and funny choice.

Nothing in the script of *Scandal* was as cruel as the wig Ian McKellen wore as John Profumo. And the choice of a twitching, neurotic Dirk Bogarde to play General Browning, the general allegedly responsible for the defeat in *A Bridge Too Far*, almost provoked a change in the law, permitting people to sue for libel on behalf of the dead.

Not to mention the cruellest of all libels, the performance of Burt Lancaster in *Sweet Smell of Success*.

J. J. HUNSECKER

Left: Cliff Robertson playing Hugh Hefner in *Star 80*.
Right: J. T. Walsh as Bob Woodward in *Wired*.



bfi
books

AUTUMN TITLES



ANDY WARHOL: Film Factory Edited by Michael O'Pray

This collection provides a definitive reassessment of Andy Warhol's major contribution to avant-garde cinema, and includes essays by Kathy Acker, Peter Wollen, Parker Tyler, and others.

£20.00 hardback 0 85170 250 3
£8.95 paperback 0 85170 243 7
September 1989 160pp

EARLY CINEMA Space-Frame-Narrative Edited by Thomas Elsaesser

With the cinema now approaching its centenary, interest in the early years is booming. This collection of essays presents new ideas about how the cinema developed – so quickly – into a major industry and art form.

£22.50 approx hardback 0 85170 244 9
£9.95 approx paperback 0 85170 245 7
Winter 1989 352pp

QUESTIONS OF THIRD CINEMA Edited by Jim Pines and Paul Willemen

In a wide-ranging series of essays, this book discusses cinema outside of the mainstream Western tradition and offers a provocative analysis of the political problems and aesthetic possibilities of a different kind of film-making.

£7.95 paperback 0 85170 230 9
August 1989 246pp

THE BROADCASTING DEBATE

Written by a team of experts, this new series aims to provide key information and argument that have been lacking in the recent debates over changes in the television industry.

ORGANISING FOR CHANGE IN
THE TELEVISION INDUSTRY 0 85170 251 1
THE EUROPEAN EXPERIENCE 0 85170 252 X
RESPONSES TO THE
WHITE PAPER 0 85170 253 8
THE TELEVISION HERITAGE 0 85170 254 6
THE NEGLECTED AUDIENCE 0 85170 255 4
THE QUESTION OF QUALITY 0 85170 256 2
£4.95 paperback Autumn 1989 approx 72pp

Available from good bookshops or the
Publications Department,
British Film Institute
29-35 Rathbone Street,
London W1P 1AG. 01 636 3289

HENRY

J I L L F O R B E S

In the last few years the English stage has seen Shakespeare cease to be the preserve of the RSC and enter the commercial theatre with considerable success. The Renaissance Theatre Company, whose membership reads like a roll call of former RSC luminaries, has been at the forefront of this revival of interest, and actor-manager Kenneth Branagh has been saluted both as the man who proved that classical theatre did not need subsidy and as the successor to the illustrious actor-managers of the Shakespearean tradition.

Branagh has now completed his first film as director: *Henry V*, with essentially the same cast as the 1984 RSC production. This is both an audacious and a symbolic enterprise, not so much in theatrical terms, since *Henry V* is one of Shakespeare's best-known and most accessible plays, but in terms of the cinema, for Laurence Olivier's 1944 film stands as an inescapable point of comparison to anyone who aspires to succeed.

When asked if he felt intimidated by Olivier's *Henry*, Branagh replied that it was so distant and that the world had changed so much that it had become almost irrelevant. But while it is true that the two performances diverge so much as to render comparison almost impossible, the play and Olivier's production of it still carry a symbolic charge which will affect the reception of Branagh's production and probably assist it.

It is worth remembering that Olivier's film is dedicated to the men of the RAF who defended the country in the Battle of Britain, and that throughout the 1950s it was incorporated into a version of 'our island story' which suggested that after the foreign excursions of the 1940s a new Elizabethan Age was dawning. It is nevertheless difficult to see how Olivier squared such a reading with what the play is actually about. First, Henry was not threatened by an invading army but was in fact the aggressor, laying claim to great stretches

of France. Second, virtually as soon as he captured Harfleur, he began to attempt his retreat to Calais, making efforts to circumvent rather than to engage the French.

The analogy, if there is one, with episodes of the Second World War comes from the notion of the 'few' (happy or otherwise) and of a victory snatched from the jaws of defeat. The

their documents, and the Welshman, Scotsman, Irishman gag which runs through the play, giving splendid opportunities for the deployment of flamboyantly artificial regional accents.

By the same token, the tavern hearthies are really keen to go to war; for all their ironic comments, and the treachery of the peers, exposed just as Henry is about to embark, is a scene which Olivier cuts the better to stress national unity. The set and costume designs play up the ceremonial and procedural aspects of medieval warfare, the comings and goings of the herald, the detail of the armour; and when Henry woos Kate, in the rather unsatisfactory final act of the play, Olivier plays the role as a matinee idol, flagrantly setting aside Henry's protestation that he 'never looks in his glass for love of anything he sees there'.

Today Olivier's *Henry V* has acquired further resonance. It opens with an aerial view of medieval London, the camera travelling westwards upstream from the Tower over London Bridge to the South Bank to where the 'Wooden O' referred to by the Chorus was located. Indeed, it will be recalled that the first act of the play is filmed as though it were a stage performance, with heavily made-up actors, backstage shots and applause punctuating the best lines. Olivier, of course, wished to invoke the memory of the heroic defence of the City and of the cultural heritage that had been under threat. Today, by a supreme irony, we note that the camera comes to rest above the site of the Rose Theatre, which has lately become the emblem of a different kind of destruction, the wholesale abandonment of London to property developers.

Not that Southwark's waterfront has anything particular to recommend it except its historical remains, and the forces which turned London into an international financial capital undoubtedly originated in the imperial traditions forged by rulers such as Henry and Elizabeth. However, the



Laurence Olivier.

idea which runs through much British war propaganda, that the British may not be pretentious and that they have a rather endearing predilection for improvised solutions and muddling through, but that when the chips are really down by God they can fight and win, is read back into *Henry V*. Olivier's production therefore plays up those aspects of the play which stress British eccentricities and particularisms, such as the comic and garrulous clergymen Ely and Canterbury, fumbling with

Olivier version glosses rapidly over the internationalism of our medieval ancestors and highlights the virtues of the Little Englander; nowhere more so than in its treatment of the priests, who have been reduced, anachronistically, to the humbler status more consonant with the post-Reformation Church of England than that of the representatives of Rome. Thus the play may be read as a fascinating contribution to that strange dialogue between France and England, in which the French are cast as bound by custom and etiquette, lovers of formality and luxury and incapable, ultimately, of the flexibility supplied by British pragmatism: the French king is decrepit, his Dauphin is a fop, his army faction-ridden and preoccupied with status rather than efficacy. *Henry V* has made a great contribution to Thatcherism.

Kenneth Branagh's *Henry* is only partly in this tradition. He himself resembles Olivier only in possessing luminous eyes. For the rest, he is ungainly where Olivier was graceful, natural where Olivier was artificial, impatient both with the niceties of the interpretation of the Salic Law and with the etiquette of the French court, a man of action and a politician.

Branagh's performance and production support his contention that *Henry V* is more complex than it is often given credit for and that the play has much to say about the geopolitics of medieval Europe. When Henry confronts the French King it is a meeting of equals, though the age gap between the two men is considerable; both are to a degree dependent on the successful conclusion of alliances with the Duke of Burgundy. So Paul Scofield plays the French King as a dignified man suffering a temporary military embarrassment, while Burgundy is seen as the broker between the two powers, presiding at the centre of a long table, at whose extremities sit France and England, while the details of Henry's marriage to Katherine are worked out. The viewer cannot but concur with this reading, which makes sense of the final part of the play and the rather downbeat comments of the Chorus on Henry's succession that 'lost France and made his England bleed'.

Branagh also plays the king as a simple man more through necessity than choice: though he is king his predicament constrains him to simplicity. In the heat of battle he resembles his men and is distinguishable only by the rather muddy coat of arms on his tunic; when he exhorts his troops, he climbs on to a simple wooden cart to address them. There is no swashbuckling, no leaping on to prancing steeds, few grand gestures. When he enjoins them to go once more into the breach at Harfleur, it is a disappointment. The King is also

portrayed as himself regional in a rather interesting manner so that the fellow Welshman, Fluellen, brilliantly captured by Ian Holm, is seen as Henry's privileged interlocutor. Do Branagh's own Ulster origins have a bearing on this?

Any *Henry V*, of course, must stand or fall by its Agincourt. John Keegan in his fascinating book on famous battles makes the point that we should forget Uccello when attempting to imagine medieval battlefields, which were dirty, squalid and, above all, confused. He also reminds us that the main reason why ordinary men could be persuaded to go to war was the hope of loot. Branagh's Agincourt is almost satisfactory. The battlefield is a rugby pitch of mud, covered with writhing bodies, some dying, some wrestling with each other, most too dirty to be identified as belonging to one side or the other.

Apparently the piles of bodies which the chroniclers say were left after Agincourt, and which we glimpse briefly, were produced for the film by a process known as Vacform which allows plastic

English wearily strike camp, almost too tired to enjoy their victory, the rendering of 'Non nobis' by the troops slouching towards Calais gives a poignancy to the conventional words of thanksgiving. The confusion and horror of the battle we have just witnessed were so great that it seems divine intervention must have carried the day. This is undoubtedly the most moving and convincing scene of the film.

What is missing in Branagh's version is a development of the notion of ceremony. *Henry V*, which is elaborately structured by the Chorus, is also a play about play-acting; which, as all the Marxist critics of Shakespeare rightly stress, is an essential component of Shakespeare's notion of kingship, nowhere more so than in *Henry V*. The famous scene in which Henry walks through the English camp before the battle, in which he assumes a different guise while asserting 'I think the King is but a man as I am', underlines his humanity and the precariousness of his position, but also the capacity and the necessity to fulfil a role: 'What have kings that privates have not too? Save ceremony. ...?'

Because Henry's youth had been misspent with Falstaff and the gang, he is a perfect illustration of the thesis that kings are made and not born, so that Olivier, with his heavy make-up and theatrical gestures and the thoroughgoing anti-naturalism of his performance, exploits an important dimension of the play that Branagh elides. Branagh's production, ostensibly much more democratic—'we are but soldiers for the working day'—ends up as more respectful of Henry's position than does Olivier's.

It is also burdened with an obtrusive score—the price, perhaps, for hiring Simon Rattle and the Birmingham Symphony Orchestra is that you have to give them something to do—which is orchestrated for the spectacular approach rather than for Branagh's intimism, and by some of the worst sound recording it has been my misfortune to encounter, so that Henry addressing his troops before Agincourt sounds as if he is standing on the stage of the Albert Hall. Branagh has a beautiful voice that is miserably amplified and flattened here.

But perhaps the most significant aspect of this production is what its success will mean. With a cast that includes Judi Dench, Derek Jacobi, Alec McCowen and Robert Stephens, it is assured of wide distribution, and Branagh of his position as one of the most influential directors in the British classical theatre. But the choice of *Henry V* surely points to a willingness to reconsider English history after more than a decade of virtual amnesia. Will Branagh now embark on *Richard III*? ■



Kenneth Branagh.

to be extruded into human shape. On the other hand, nothing remains on screen of the magnificent model the Shepperton set designers built of the disposition of the armies and which allowed this viewer, for the first time, to understand what might have happened. The Branagh reading is naturalistic and economical and I cannot help feeling that a slightly more expensively shot battle might have made a better contribution to the geopolitical understanding of the audience. But after the

WAR RECORD



The Lion Has Wings.

CHARLES BARR, who is writing the 1940s volume
of 'The History of the British Film', has been researching at the
Public Record Office. Here he presents some of his findings.

Early in 1942, the Crown Film Unit at Pinewood embarked on a new film in its series of feature-length war-effort documentaries, *Coastal Command*. The studio scenes required a mock-up aircraft to match the location footage; a realistic aircraft required visible rivets, but genuine metal ones were too precious to supply for a film, so they would have to be simulated. The Ministry of Information liaison officer therefore wrote to the Ministry of Food, explaining that 'for this purpose there is nothing more suitable than large grey Continental lentils which will be glued on and painted over. Permission is sought to purchase 7 lbs of these.'

He took care to forestall the objection that 7 lbs might, in a time of austerity, seem an extravagant quantity of lentils for the decoration of one fake aircraft: 'It is unlikely that the whole of the 7 lbs would be used, but as the lentils are not of uniform size some selection would be necessary, and any balance would be handed over to the canteen.' A week later came good news, in a letter from an Assistant Divisional Food Officer at the MOF: 'I have asked the Food Executive Office, Westminster, to supply you with an authority to purchase, and Gennaros of Old Compton St to supply.'

With its tongue-in-cheek solemnity, its surreal opportunism, its acceptance of and triumph over shortage, this story would go nicely into any of the nostalgic anniversary scrapbooks and anecdotal histories of World War 2. While *Coastal Command* itself may not have been affected, for good or ill, by the unorthodox use of lentils, there were other cases where the austerity regulations and their bureaucratic application could exert a more significant influence.

The Clothes Rationing section of the Board of Trade was reluctant to make concessions to film companies which wanted extra materials for costumes and set-dressing. The British Film Producers Association had to agree to a strict system: application forms for supplementary coupons were to be filled in well in advance, promising that the request covered 'the absolute minimum consistent with efficient production'. The materials thus obtained must be re-used, patched up, and handed on within and between companies, rather than being stored away or (even worse) appropriated for everyday wear.

A Board official wrote in August 1941 to the producers of the *Old Mother Riley* series: 'I am writing in reply to your letter of 24th July about the list of dresses used in your recent production which you wished to allow Miss Kitty McShane to purchase... Our conclusion is that the sale of the garments without coupons is not possible. You will readily understand that as the main objective of rationing is to secure an equal share for everyone it would not be desirable to place certain persons in such a privileged position as to be able to purchase any quantity of frocks and other garments.'

The Board felt particular misgivings

about the requirements of the period melodramas that Gainsborough embarked upon in the middle of the war. *The Young Mr Pitt*, as a period film, may have required no less in the way of extra material for costumes and 'drapes', but it was a work of acknowledged propaganda value, aimed particularly at America. *The Man in Grey* was surely different: 'Its exclusive merit would appear to be entertainment, and a similar result could be obtained by a story not requiring "period costume", which, as you know, is more extravagant than any other.'

A memorandum in November 1942 laid down the principle: 'In connection with "period" films usually calling for an exceptional allotment of coupons, consideration will naturally have to take into account the urgency of the subject in the national interest. If the

**'Whoever objects must
be prepared to tell the PM
that he can't have a film
shown when he happens
to feel like it...'**

production is sponsored by the Ministry of Information, the probabilities are that the application will be granted...'. Hence, at least in part, the temporary shift in focus in Gainsborough melodrama from period to twentieth-century: *Madonna of the Seven Moons*, *Love Story*, *They Were Sisters*.

All this, and much more like it, comes from official departmental files deposited in the Public Record Office at Kew. To come as a non-historian, as I do, to the task of continuing Rachael Low's great work on *The History of the British Film* (seven volumes, spanning 1896-1939, published 1948-1985) is to be both awed and exhilarated by the pro's challenge. A wartime history can't ignore it, because the special feature of these years is precisely the complexity and depth of the Government's involvement with film.

Complexity is the right word. Thus, the PRO yields significant material in, for instance, classes BW (British Council), CAB (Cabinet), HO (Home Office), LAB (Labour), PREM (Prime Minister), WO (War Office), and even STAT (Stationery Office), as well as the big two from which I've quoted: INF (Ministry of Information) and BT (Board of Trade).

The Stationery Office housed the mysterious cobwebby figure of the Government Cinematograph Adviser: the first GCA was appointed at the end of World War 1 to supervise the practicalities of preserving war footage, and his successor fought tenaciously throughout the next war to justify his title, in defiance of the new Ministry and its upstart Films Division. Meanwhile, claims for exemption from active service, by film

workers as by others, were handled by Ministry of Labour committees; cinema opening hours were controlled by the Home Office; the Army Film Unit reported to the War Office. The Prime Minister made his interventions. Like GCA and often in alliance with him, the British Council jealously guarded its own sphere of cinematic influence against the mo.

There were, and are, negative and positive ways of looking at this intricate web of responsibilities. The view that it was a nightmare of red tape and wastefully conflicting pulls, rendering the industry frustrated, over-supervised and timid, was certainly heard at the time. The 1943 *Kine Year Book* lamented: 'The exhibitor has been engaged in what almost amounts to a dual struggle for existence. Not only has there been the always-present enemy action, but he has been beset by numberless orders, instructions and controls, any one of which might conceivably contribute to the extinction of the industry...'

Yet in many ways, except in some vulnerable coastal areas, British cinemas had their finest hour in wartime, in terms both of attendance figures and morale. Very similar complaints about fussy governmental bureaucracy—radical ones, not just momentary expressions of irritation—came repeatedly from the industry's production side, most eloquently from Ealing's Michael Balcon, effective spokesman for the progressive end of feature production, and from *Documentary News Letter*, mouthpiece of progressive documentary. Yet both Balcon and the documentary people forgot most of their criticisms in retrospect, and would soon look back on the war period as almost a Golden Age of purposeful film-making.

It was the worst of times, it was the best of times. Three new wartime factors in particular created tensions that were stressful, but also, one can argue, productive.

(1) Austerity and rationing. However irksome, the obligation to indent in triplicate for every extra clothing coupon and lentil did have the effect of putting film-makers, for a change, firmly on the same level as their audiences. To argue that this automatically gave them an instant deep empathy with these audiences would be naive, but the principle was important. Austerity values became a not insignificant part of the public image of film-making, reinforcing the way such values were promoted on screen in various types of films (short and long) and at various levels: visual texture, explicit message, implicit message.

Autumn 1989 launches us with renewed intensity into what a recent BFI publication (*National Fictions*, edited by Geoff Hurd in 1984) called in its subtitle 'struggles over the meaning of World War 2'. For the Right, as demonstrated in the shameless rhetoric of the 1986 Tory election broadcasts, the war signifies pride in national defence under a belligerent Conservative

leader. Emblematic film image: *In Which We Serve*, Noël Coward on the bridge of HMS Great Britain. For the Left, it means a glimpse of socialism in action, of the achievements possible when class hierarchies and the tyranny of the marketplace are relaxed. Emblematic image: the fire-fighting team coming together in *Fires Were Started*.

In the longer term, the most convincing reading looks like a Green Party one: the Home Front war experience as a laboratory demonstration of a finite-resources model in action, of a society accepting sub-zero growth and restricted choice and 'freedom' (of diet, travel, consumption generally); and being healthier and, on balance, happier for it. Emblematic image: the virtual absence of the private motor-car in British ww2 films. The film industry itself was demonstrably a participant in this process as well as a recorder and dramatiser of it, trimmed-down and unwasteful, compared with prewar, and healthier.

(2) Official involvement. However fussy and penny-pinching they might be, politicians and officials did at least take an interest. The scale of this interest, and the cultural shift that was represented in Britain by this acknowledgment of the role of cinema, was remarkable.

The PRO files bear out the impression given in interviews and memoirs. Ministers and senior officials involved themselves in the commissioning, planning and use of non-fiction films with a seriousness that went beyond the crude instrumentalism or PR prestige of the 1930s. Coalition ministers who gave personal support to controversial film projects included Woolton (Conservative) at Food (Paul Rotha's polemical *World of Plenty*), Hudson (Conservative) at Agriculture (Realist's *The Harvest Shall Come*), and Johnston (Labour) at the Scottish Office (the imaginative programme, guided by Forsyth Hardy, of films like the Rotha company's *Power for the Highlands* on the new hydro-electric schemes). Then there was Stafford Cripps, soon to be Labour Chancellor, who did not himself have an appropriate wartime power-base from which to sponsor films but was a strong supporter of the documentary movement, and would tell his friend Paul Rotha that documentary had prepared the ground for Labour's 1945 election win.

Perhaps the most interesting cases, however, in themselves and in PRO terms, are Churchill and Gaitskell. When Churchill took over as Prime Minister in May 1940, this meant among other things a change in the level of film awareness at the top that had great symbolic value. Churchill's vigorous if unsuccessful efforts to suppress feature films he disliked (*The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, *Next of Kin*, *Ships with Wings*) are notorious: they stemmed not from a detached hostility to cinema (like the modern politician's to TV), but from a passionate involvement, a fan's recognition of the medium's emotional power.



The Man in Grey: too many clothing coupons...

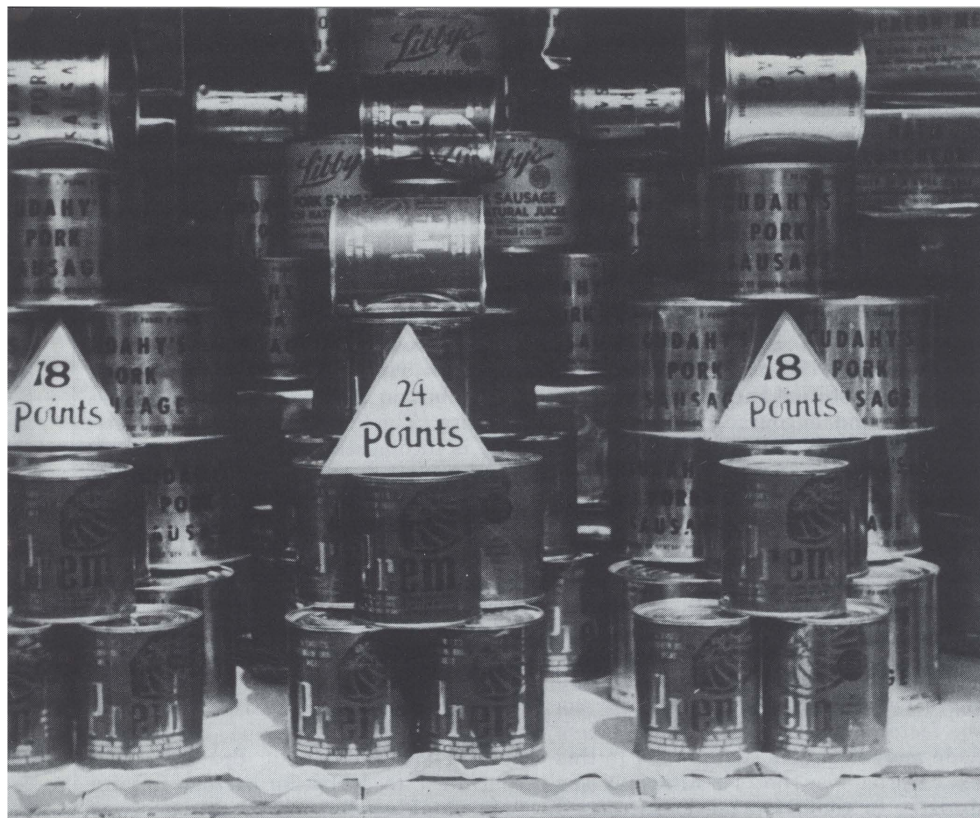
One of the Ministry of Information files deals with the 'vexed question' of the demands made on resources by Churchill's insatiable appetite for films, for himself and his weekend guests at Chequers. Typically, the main concern is with the inroads this makes into the MoI's tight budget. By 1942 the Ministry is having to provide technicians not only for two shows a week to MPs at the House of Commons, but for three full days' attendance at Chequers.

As the Ministry's technical head wrote anxiously to the Deputy Director of Films Division, Ralph Nunn May, in

November 1942: 'The PM's operators are required to be available at all times during the weekends. As you know, the PM is liable to ask for a show at any time—for instance, he had a film shown during the afternoon of Sunday 1 November in addition to the evening films. An appreciable part of the operator's time is taken up in spooling up the four or five feature programmes which are taken to the PM's residence each week.' Nunn May sagely minuted: 'Whoever objects to the present arrangement must, in fairness, be prepared to tell the PM that he can't have a film

A Churchill favourite: Peggy Ashcroft and Robert Newton in *Channel Incident*.





Paul Rotha's *World of Plenty*: support from Lord Woolton.

shown when he happens to feel like it.'

No one did so. Churchill's recurrent favourites, incidentally, included not only Korda's American-made *Lady Hamilton*, but the *moi*'s narrative short *Channel Incident*, which celebrates the story of the Dunkirk evacuation through the agonies of a middle-class woman (Peggy Ashcroft) searching for and finding her husband: the public story told through, and symbolised in, the intense individual emotion. This was a film that had particularly outraged the purists of the documentary movement by the way it used the precious 5-minute national weekly slot (negotiated by the Ministry for government message films) for a work of fiction-type personal identification. No doubt they were as unaware of Churchill's pleasure in it as he was of their disapproval: it remains an evocative vignette of cinema's power at this time both to unite and to divide, serving different purposes and audiences.

While the Prime Minister, like many fellow-citizens, was escaping into the emotional involvement of popular films, a future Labour Party leader was regulating the industry that produced them. An economist who had failed to get into Parliament in the 1930s, Hugh Gaitskell became one of the celebrated high-flying temporary civil servants of wartime, working at the Board of Trade in close partnership with Hugh Dalton (Board President 1942-1945). Both Dalton and Gaitskell have their own definitive biographer who also edited their diaries—Ben Pimlott and Philip Williams respectively—but (typically of this genre) neither writer is much interested in his subject's film industry responsibilities, though Williams does acknowledge in passing that among his various Board of Trade tasks Gaitskell was 'most fascinated by the film industry'.

It is fascinating in turn to explore in the *PRO/BT* papers the memoranda Gaitskell wrote about films, in particular his briefing documents for Dalton's negotiations over the structure of the industry—which means, basically, the growth of the lopsided *ABPC*/Rank duopoly and the problems it created. Gaitskell clearly relished the work, knew his subject, had firm ideas (writing in 1943 of the weaker member of the duopoly that '*ABPC* are at present producing little more than rubbish, and cannot be regarded as a serious producing company'), and took a major part in formulating the Board's policy—on the whole more sympathetic to Rank, as a strong British force to counter American dominance, than to his anti-monopoly critics.

The point to note in this context is the detailed way in which two senior Labour politicians (present and future) engage in the nuts and bolts of the film business, neither naively nor patronisingly, negotiating minute details of studio allocation and cinema ownership. Cinema is given a respect which it has rarely had from British establishment figures—is recognised to *matter* economically, but not only economically (see various *PRO/BT* files including 64/4529 and 4530).

(3) The third important new element in wartime cinema is of course the *moi* itself, and its Films Division. Like the austerity regulations, like the interest taken in cinema by a political elite, it was both an irritant and a stimulus. 'No doubt the *M of I* has too many enthusiastic amateurs on the job, and their sense of public requirements cannot be better illustrated than by the groan that goes up from the audience when "The *M of I* presents..." is flashed upon the screen,' said the 1944 *Kine Year Book*. Kenneth Clark, reminiscing in 1974, thought the Ministry, 'was a perfectly useless body,

and the war would have been in no way affected if it had been dissolved and only the [powers of] censorship retained.'

Clark had been briefly in charge of the Films Division, for the early months of 1940, before taking on wider responsibilities for Home Publicity. He was exactly the kind of person who fitted Roy Boulting's description of the Division as 'very much an amateur show... a hotch-potch of dilettantes, academics, odds and sods, writers.' Another was John Betjeman, who did two *moi* stints as a script editor for propaganda short films, behaved with famous eccentricity, and wrote as scathingly about the place in retrospect as Clark did. To Michael Powell, on the other hand, in his 1986 memoirs, 'the Ministry of Information was a great success, and its Films Division was one of its triumphs.' He too is not alone.

What explains this discrepancy? An adequate answer would require an article to itself, and more, but here are some considerations. Like the Ministry as a whole, Films Division changed substantially during the war, but it was hard for either to escape from the negative early public image formed under Chamberlain. The eloquent rubbishing of it by insiders (Clark, Betjeman) and outsiders (including Waugh and Orwell) owes something both to this and to an embarrassed guilt at the existence of this 'un-British' propaganda institution, which was destined to be wound up and forgotten as soon as possible when the war ended. Some of the bad press came from vested interests, not only in the trade but in the British Council and the BFI, to which Films Division was mounting a determined opposition (which it is hard not to applaud). Some of the bad press was also tactical, from writers friendlier than it was politic for them to sound, notably in *Documentary News Letter*. And it was a big organisation, whose success rate was uneven.

The big gap in the record is the total exclusion of the Films Division from the standard *moi* history *Ministry of Morale*. Ian McLaine explains his thinking in a single unindexed footnote, appended to his summary of the more successful aspects of the Ministry's work. 'The work of the Crown Film Unit had little impact: "A nice little flash in the cultural pan—kept the documentary filmmakers happy, but had almost no effect, as the films had *v. small* audiences." According to Tom Harrisson, Mass-Observation found that audiences did not respond to the films as the makers and the Ministry intended.' The comment in quotes comes from an *moi* veteran unconnected with Films Division. In its concentrated wrongness the passage provides a useful basis for sketching what did go on:

(a) The Crown Film Unit was only one of the *moi*'s film responsibilities, which spanned documentary, compilation film, feature and newsreel. (b) Even within 'documentary', Crown was only one company among many. Its operations did not serve to 'keep the

documentary film-makers happy', indeed the favoured position of Crown caused nagging jealousies and resentments. (c) Crown films did not have uniformly small audiences. Many had effective theatrical showings, in Britain and/or abroad, the two main categories being 5-minute or 15-minute films (distributed free to all UK cinemas), and documentary features which exhibitors paid for. Examples respectively are *London (or Britain) Can Take It* and *Target for Tonight*, both spectacular successes at home and overseas money-earners. (d) Some of the short films commissioned from companies other than Crown were indeed destined for smaller audiences on the non-theatrical circuit, but small audience doesn't necessarily mean small impact, especially when specific groups are being targeted. (e) Harrison never, at the time or afterwards, wrote off all the Ministry's film efforts as ineffective; and if audiences did not respond to a given film exactly as intended, so what?—the films can still be worthwhile. (f) It's ironic that the considerable interest of the McLaine book lies precisely in analysing propaganda campaigns in media other than film that were far from working as their authors intended; ironic, also, that while most of this output of the Ministry is now of purely archival interest, such Crown films as *Fires Were Started* and *Western Approaches*, to say nothing of other MOI-sponsored films, can still hold an audience.

Having cleared that ground, I will end by instancing some of the kinds of material held in the INF files at the Public Record Office which can help to build an integrated picture of Film Division's operations, and integrate them in turn into the understanding of wartime cinema.

John Grierson. One of the riddles of this wartime cinema is Grierson's absence from it. In the late 30s one would have forecast that, in the event of war, an effective British cinema of information and inspiration would be dominated by Grierson, along with Hitchcock as leading commercial director and Korda as producer. Yet these three (like the decade's top British star, Gracie Fields) did little or no wartime work in Britain, but shifted their base to North America—and, of course, did some effective propaganda work, despite cheap 'gone with the wind up' sneers. It seems that state-sponsored documentary, like the BBC which John Reith left in 1938, worked more effectively, in the new circumstances, in the absence of its charismatic and prickly founding father.

At the time war was declared, Grierson was on a visit to Hollywood, from where he dashed off a cable to the MOI (see facing page). He could hardly have made more blunders than he did in this text. Korda was not i/c Films at the Ministry (a confusion no doubt caused by reports that his propaganda feature *The Lion Has Wings* was already in production); the idea of any sort of covert propaganda initiative in the US frightened those who were in charge, as being likely to be counter-productive; the three documentary men named were, to them, politically suspect; and the telegram had rashly been sent unciphered.

The early Films Division, under the man from Conservative Central Office, Joseph Ball, may not have been very good at getting films made, but they were skilful enough at deploying memoranda in the right quarters to discredit Grierson and block his initiative. Even when a more sympathetic

regime had taken over Films Division, and Grierson was running the National Film Board of Canada, relations continued to be distant, as when Grierson used the wrong channels in 1942 to make a fuss about the quota status of NFBC films. (These episodes can be traced through PRO INF 1/627 and 1/628.)

British Council and BFI. It took quite a lot to ruffle the urbane Kenneth Clark, but on 7 May 1940 he was moved to write, 'The fact is that the Film Institute is incompetent and Mr Oliver Bell [its director] an interfering busybody.' It is useful to be reminded of the narrow and sectional role the Institute had at that time, as set out very lucidly by Rachael Low in her account of its early years (Appendix to *Documentary and Educational Films of the 1930s*). Bell, like his friend Joseph Ball, had strong Conservative Party connections. Though Ball was quickly replaced at the head of Films Division, Bell stayed at the BFI throughout the war, and continued to lobby for a role in film policy-making for which the BFI was neither equipped nor needed.

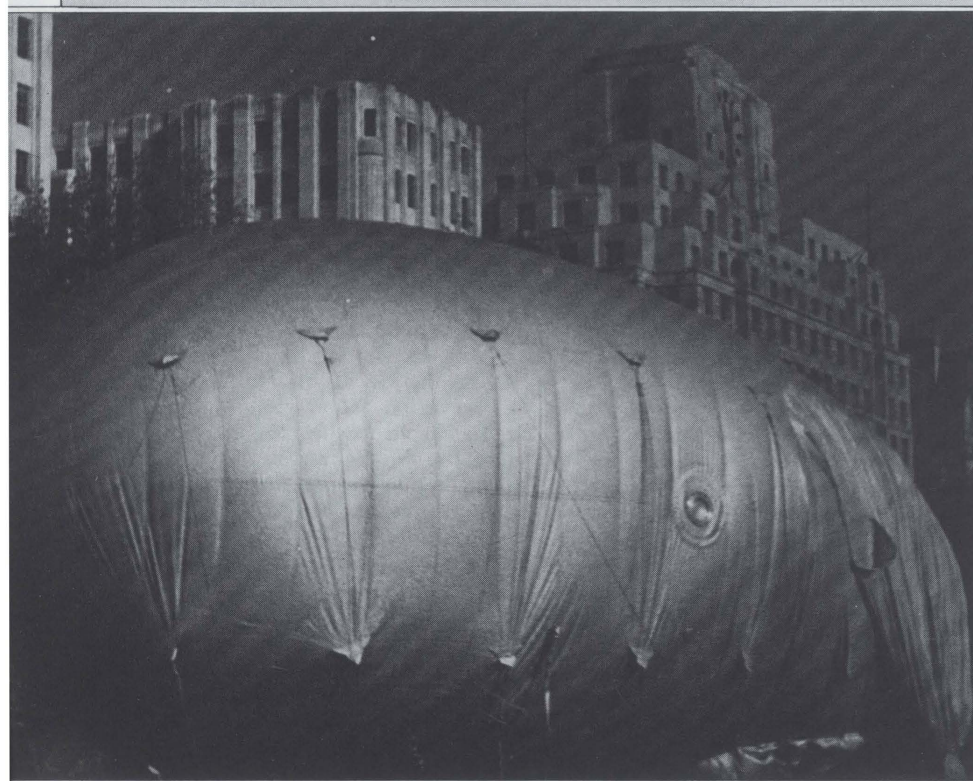
Government Cinematograph Adviser, British Council and BFI form a loose reactionary alliance that becomes more and more marginalised as the war goes on. PRO papers enable the tensions and arguments between the British Council and the MOI to be traced in entertaining detail, from both sides. The Council was determined to keep its share of resources to continue making 'cultural' short films and sending them abroad. Films Division disagreed, and from time to time would go to the top and get their long-term Minister, Brendan Bracken, to express disapproval to the Council.

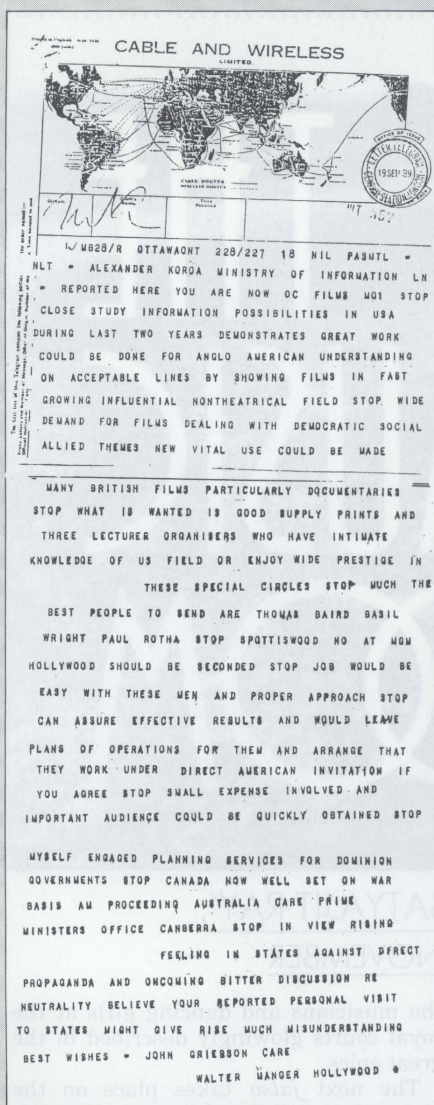
An enclosure in Bracken's letter to their chairman in November 1941 claimed: 'Ill-conceived and inept propaganda is rarely harmless. It usually reinforces the arguments of the other side. This is true of the four British Council films recently seen here, on the Clyde, on English Inns, on the Western Isles of Scotland and on Kew Gardens. For this reason their despatch from Britain should be stopped. To audiences in neutral countries they will seem to be living proof of Goebbels' statements that the British are frivolous, or that they are fighting the war to preserve a way of living long since outmoded . . . An accumulation of films such as these could go far towards bringing neutral countries in on the German side.'

Strong stuff, and a fine illustration of the point about film, for a change, being taken with deadly seriousness at a high level. The clash shows the MOI involving itself closely in the dominant ideological debates of mid-war, just as many of the short films it sponsored and distributed were doing. (For the BFI material see PRO INF 1/615, and for the Council material BW 4/64.)

The GPO/Crown Film Unit. The romantic story of the Government-sponsored film unit being idle and forgotten at the start of the war, then after

The First Days: the September 1939 documentary, made on a £1,500 budget.





some weeks deciding to make a film off its own bat, which became *The First Days*, and presenting it to a startled moi, has become part of the late-1939 mythology—see, for instance, the autobiography of one of the team who made the film, Harry Watt. Yet a Films Division memo of 9 September records that the Unit had submitted a proposal for this film and been authorised to ‘proceed at once’, with a £1,500 budget. This discrepancy is symptomatic. The PRO files disclose an unfamiliar history, and reveal, for me, an unfamiliar hero. The full story of Crown, as of Films Division, has not yet been written.

It was confirmed in August 1939 that the GPO Film Unit (makers of *Night Mail* and *North Sea*, etc) should be available in wartime to the Ministry of Information for general film propaganda purposes. From 24 August the unit was charged to the moi while remaining officially under GPO control. This caused ‘extraordinary complexities’, and the next stage was for the moi to take the unit over completely, which it did on 1 April 1940. (The Post Office was to have the option of taking it back after the war, but this seems to have been quickly forgotten.)

Films Division, that April, was in a state of transition, as was the country. Jack Beddington was about to take over

from Kenneth Clark. When he did so, he found the Film Unit in the hands of A. G. Highet, who had come into Films Division from the Post Office. The need for economy was in the air, and Highet soon decided to act. On 11 July he wrote to the moi Establishment: ‘I cannot justify the retention of highly paid film directors. I therefore propose to dispense with the services of the following unestablished officers: Cavalcanti, Watt, Jennings. One week’s notice please.’

A second letter sacked other key technicians, including editor Stewart McAllister. Beddington, faced with a crisis, acted rapidly, blocking the dismissals and removing Highet, who returned to the Post Office.

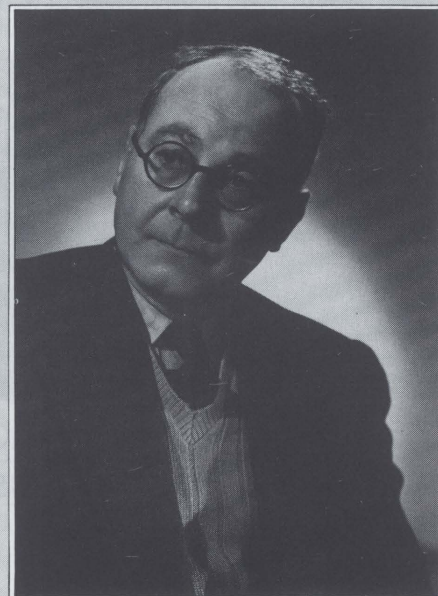
In August, several things happened. Cavalcanti, Director of the Unit since 1937, transferred to Ealing Studios. This is usually explained by two factors: his Brazilian nationality, which made it awkward to employ him in an established Government post, and Michael Balcon’s wish to instal documentary methods at Ealing. But it was more complicated. Whether the Brazilian factor is significant I have not been able to establish for sure, since opinions conflict sharply. What is certain, from the files, is that Michael Balcon had been preparing to take over the whole GPO Unit and house it at Ealing, with Beddington’s approval. At the last minute, Beddington drew back, and Balcon went off in a huff, taking Cavalcanti with him. In December he publicly broke with the moi, refusing any further collaborations. Soon, Harry Watt went over to Ealing as well.

A new director of the GPO Unit was appointed in August: Ian Dalrymple. (Not until the end of the year was the name changed to Crown, evidently on his suggestion.) On first reading Michael Powell’s description of Dalrymple in *A Life in Movies* as ‘the great documentary film-maker of the war’, one thinks there must be some mistake. What about Jennings and Watt and Rotha? What did Dalrymple, writer of scripts for MGM and Korda, have to do with real documentary? Watt certainly didn’t think he was ‘one of them’, and claims to have been driven to join Ealing by his appointment.

Yet he seems a crucial figure in two ways. First, for his tireless efforts behind the scenes to improve the very low pay of Crown personnel; to speak up for the unit, soon after his arrival, in the face of a searching internal inquiry as to whether it should continue or be wound up; and—when it survived and moved to Pinewood for the duration—to ensure continuity of production and funding. Second, for the way he embodies the crossover between commercial cinema and documentary that was central to the Crown project and to British wartime cinema.

As writer of such strong late-30s features as *The Citadel* and *A Window in London*, he had incorporated fresh location passages (and a degree of radicalism) into classically constructed narrative scripts; as writer of Korda’s

propaganda film *The Lion Has Wings*, he had constructed a hasty and confused hybrid which at least signalled a recognition of the potential for bringing ‘documentary’ truth and ‘fictional’ identification strategies into relation with one another. Now, he supported directors like Lee, Jackson and Jennings in finding a more satisfying model of integration between truth and emotion in their feature-length, non-acted, beautifully austere drama-documentaries: *Fires Were Started*, *Close Quarters*, *Western Approaches*. (PRO INF files on the Crown unit, in addition to those on specific films, include 1/57, 1/81, 1/460-4.)



Unfamiliar hero: Ian Dalrymple.

Finally, there is one unchallengeable achievement that survived all the wartime infighting between institutions. The subject of PRO INF 1/626 is the Film History of the War. Dalrymple to Beddington on 6 April 1941: ‘The idea occurred to me today for the compilation of an exhaustive history of the war on film. I was sending you in a note about it, when I discovered that Sidney [Bernstein] had already had the same idea...’

While their proposal for an actual war history on film had to be shelved, it was transformed into a campaign to preserve and catalogue all available film prints and film footage. The Government Cinematograph Adviser, whose subject it was, came into his own, sitting on committees with senior officers of the Services, the moi, the War Museum and the BFI. This was one impetus that was not lost: ‘the exhaustive history of the war on film’ was in due course compiled, in the shape of Thames’ magnificent 26-part series *The World at War* (1976). And when watching all the familiar and unfamiliar archive footage of the war years that will be feeding our TV screens this autumn and thereafter, we should honour the vision of Sidney Bernstein, who is no stranger to honours, and of Ian Dalrymple, who was, and who died on 28 April this year. ■



A CHAPTER FROM ANDREW ROBINSON'S 'SATYAJIT RAY',
TO BE PUBLISHED BY ANDRE DEUTSCH ON 2 NOVEMBER

'*The Music Room* is a deeply felt, extremely tedious film. On the one hand its western derivations are patent (the Greek-revival mansion no more than the Chekhovian theme). On the other hand its chief indigenous element, the Indian music, is simply uncongenial and tiresome to our ears. No doubt these are excellent musical performances for those who understand them, but they make us start counting the bulbs in the theatre chandelier.'

So wrote the American critic Stanley Kauffman, when the film was released in the United States in 1963. At the same time, his colleague on the *New York Times*—none other than Bosley Crowther who had dismissed *Pather Panchali*—wrote, 'I wish I had space to be more voluble about the special felicities of this film—about the delicacy of the direction, about the performance that Chabi (*sic*) Biswas gives as the decaying landowner, about the pathos of Padma Devi as his wife, about the eloquence of the Indian music and the aura of the *mise en scène*.'

To Satyajit Ray's surprise, *The Music Room* (*Jalsaghar*) is a film that excites passions abroad and enjoys a minor cult status. Its showing in Paris in 1981 was largely responsible for opening French eyes to Ray's films after years of indifference. The anonymous London *Times* critic in 1962 felt that it 'offered pleasures of unique delicacy and refinement', and Derek Malcolm, writing in 1975, described it as Ray's 'most perfect film'. But when he made it in 1958, says Ray today, 'I didn't think of it

as a film which would export at all.'

The Music Room is his only film, with the possible exception of *The Goddess*, in which the central character has no capacity for change. It shows a man living in his past, finally destroyed by his own inflexibility. The opening scene sets the tone. The ageing zamindar Biswambhar Roy is reclining motionless in a chair on the roof of his palace at dawn, watching the stars go out. His servant, also no longer young, brings him his beaker of sherbet and settles it beside his hookah. 'What month is it?' asks Roy, after a pause. Then, when the servant is gone, the peace that Roy is obviously used to is disturbed by the notes of a festive *shehnai* drifting over the roof. His neighbour, the money-lender and businessman Ganguli, is holding a celebration of his son's *upanayan*—the ceremony where he will be invested with the sacred thread.

Memories of Roy's own son receiving his thread come flooding back. We are transported to the time when Roy was at the height of his powers. After the ceremony and a lavish firework display, there is a grand musical soirée (*jalsa*) in Roy's imposing, pillared music room. As Roy and his guests (including a younger Ganguli) look on, well supplied with drink, a female singer performs Lucknow *thumris* bursting with emotion, which describe a gathering storm. Later that night, we gather from Roy's slurred conversation with his wife in their bedroom that he is willing to spend his last gold coin to hear such singing. Music totally obsesses him; he even dreams of

the musicians and dancing girls at the royal courts glowingly described in the great epics.

The next *jalsa* takes place on the night of a real thunderstorm. His wife and son have meanwhile gone away to her family, but Roy has sent word that they should return for the *jalsa*, which he has announced to celebrate the (Bengali) New Year—also, to spite his *nouveau riche* neighbour Ganguli. The atmosphere in the music room is charged, as a bearded Muslim singer gives a pyrotechnic display of *kheyal* with complex ornamentation and filigrees, while lightning flashes outside. Roy's wife and son have not arrived. As a winged insect trapped in his glass struggles helplessly to escape, Roy senses the worst.

The drowning of his family on their way home at his behest parallels the steady drowning of Roy's zamindari estate by the mighty river Padma that flows by it, which has eaten up so much of East Bengal's history. He feels his life to be finished and, as the years pass, falls further and further into torpor. Only his decaying palace, a few faithful servants, and Toofan the stallion and Moti the elephant remain; he cannot bring himself to part with these last two. On the morning that he hears Ganguli's *shehnai*, he decides to pay a visit downstairs to see them after his long retreat from the world. Toofan is pleased to hear his voice again, but when Roy turns his gaze on to Moti who is grazing in the distance, to his disgust the picture is obscured with dust

thrown up by some intrusive lorries.

They belong, of course, to Ganguli, and to the modern world. When the man himself, oozing self-made prosperity, then comes personally to invite the zamindar to his new music room for a performance by the up-and-coming dancer Krishna Bai, Roy naturally refuses the upstart. But the invitation, and the music he hears drifting across from Ganguli's house that night, sting him into action. There and then he lays plans for one final *jalsa*, with Krishna Bai, to demonstrate to Ganguli the élan of the real connoisseur and aristocrat.

After all the guests are gone, lurching around the deserted music room with only alcohol, his servant and his memories to keep him company, Roy begins to lose his mind. Besotted by his aristocratic past framed in the portraits of his ancestors all around him, he convinces himself, as the candles in the chandeliers start to go out with the coming of morning, that he is the last of his line. He must extinguish himself with a grand gesture; and so, mounting Toofan, he gallops off across the sands at a terrible pace. As the horse encounters the half-buried hull of a boat—perhaps the very one in which Roy's family drowned years before—it shies, throwing its drunken rider, whose life finally ebbs out of him while his two servants look tearfully on.

The film is based on a well-known Bengali short story by Tarasankar Banerjee. It drew Ray for several reasons: partly because the audience would know the story, partly because the main character interested him, but mostly because it offered legitimate scope for music and dancing, the ingredients that Bengali producers have always sought from a director. At a time when concerts of Indian classical music were full to overflowing, this would be the first film to employ such music and dancing as an integral part.

The fact was that in late 1956, after the failure of *Aparajito* at the box office, Satyajit Ray knew that he needed a winner. As he put it then, in a letter, 'I am more or less back where I started from. Bank balance is low and the future looks none too rosy . . . One thing is certain: I have to make money on [my next film] if I am to continue as a filmmaker and not revert to advertising.'

His intention had been that the film should be more frivolous than it turned out to be, using music of a lighter, less austere nature. But his true feelings towards the character and the music, combined with those of Vilayat Khan, the composer, ended by modifying the original idea. 'In the process of writing the screenplay,' remarks Ray today, 'it became a fairly serious study of feudalism and also the music became very high-classical stuff.' In May 1957, as shooting began, he wrote to Marie Seton that the film was 'a rather showy piece about a decadent music-loving



Chhabi Biswas as the zamindar Biswambhar Roy.

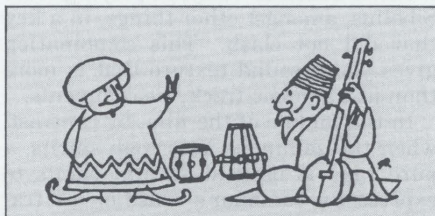
zamindar and his fantastic efforts to uphold family prestige'; but in a letter of February 1958 it had become a 'brooding drama'.

The discovery of the palace was a story in itself. Ray and his team had just inspected their thirtieth nobleman's palace and rejected it, when an old man in a tea shop overheard them talking and suggested they visit the palace of the Chowdhurys at Nimtita on the border with East Pakistan (as it then was). Without much hope, they agreed to go.

'Nimtita turned out to be everything that the old man claimed—and more. No one could have described in words the feeling of utter desolation that surrounded the palace,' wrote Ray in his gem of an article 'Winding route to a music room'. The owner was a seventy-year-old zamindar who knew one of Ray's grand-uncles and who was the antithesis of Biswambhar Roy: he neither drank alcohol nor listened to music. But he had experience of that kind of behaviour through his late uncle Upendra Narayan Chowdhury, builder of the palace music room. (This last was the only disappointment for Ray; it was too small, so the film used a music room lovingly created by his art director Bansi Chandragupta.) By an amazing coincidence, Upendra Narayan was the very zamindar on whom the writer Banerjee had based his character, as Ray later discovered back in Calcutta when he told him about finding the palace at Nimtita.

The film's composer Vilayat Khan, like all the great Indian musicians until recent times, had grown up in the service of a rich patron and was wholly in sympathy with Biswambhar Roy; where Ray would have favoured 'an ironic edge' to the music, Vilayat Khan sought to convey only 'sweetness and greatness'. 'He wrote a lovely theme for Biswambhar Roy, which I was rather worried about,' says Ray. 'I wanted a more neutral kind of approach to the music to go with the zamindar, not suggesting that I was full of sympathy for him, but a kind of ambivalent attitude. But I liked Vilayat's theme as a piece of music and I felt the story would tell what I wanted to tell and the music would not interfere with my general attitude to feudalism.'

Ray had already experienced serious difficulties in working with a classical musician as film composer in *Aparajito*, and the making of *The Music Room* only reinforced his growing reservations. None of the great musicians with whom he has worked—Ravi Shankar, Vilayat Khan and Ali Akbar Khan—



MUSIC GLOSSARY

Esraj: a four-stringed instrument with sympathetic strings and a sound similar to a violin.

Kathak: north Indian style of dancing characterised by fast footwork and interplay of rhythms performed by both men and women; influenced by Hindu and also Mughal traditions.

Kheyal: literally, 'imagination'. A charming, light style of singing often used for love songs, developed since the twelfth century in response to the rigidity of Indian classical singing. It has been compared to bel canto.

Mridangam: the classical drum of south India, as the *tabla* is of the north.

Shehnai: the classical wind instrument of north India, a favourite in temples and at weddings. Its sound somewhat resembles the bagpipes.

Tanpura: a four-stringed instrument with sympathetic strings, used as a drone accompaniment for the sitar and other instruments.

Thumri: a style of singing that developed out of *kheyal* at Lucknow and Benares. Its name derives from 'thumuk', the sound of a graceful stamp of the foot. It is purely romantic music.



The final jalsa: Roy pays the dancer, Roshan Kumari, with the last of his money.

could entirely mould their talents to the demands of a film, and none of them could begin to approach Ray's understanding of western music. Fortunately for *The Music Room*, Vilayat Khan's younger brother Imrat was able to act as a kind of interpreter and mediator; he had an intelligent appreciation of film music, having seen a lot of foreign films.

While much of the music in the film is pure classical, including all performances in the three *jalsas*, some of it is an unorthodox combination of instruments and eastern and western elements—the beginning of experiments by Ray that he would continue to develop with beauty and subtlety as his own composer from 1961 onwards. As the film's opening titles roll, for instance, 'a rather bleak, rather austere morning raga' *Todi* is heard against a string background. 'We had decided to use violins,' recalls Ray, 'not necessarily for melodic purposes, but to give a body, a background texture, instead of using a *tanpura*, which is a drone. I felt that would make it sound too much like a concert performance. So we decided on

using strings as a drone, holding the tonic, even doing rhythmic things, instead of using the *tabla* or the *mridangam*, which would again make it sound like a concert performance. And Vilayat agreed to that.'

Another example of mixing occurs near the end when Roy is gripped by fear of his own doom at the sight of the silently darkening chandeliers. Ray felt that Indian music alone could not convey Roy's terror, which has an element of the macabre in it too. In the editing room he added to Vilayat's playing some Sibelius, amongst other things, in a key that did not clash. 'This combination gives you a sound texture that is more than just a music-track,' he comments.

In the middle of the film, by contrast, when the zamindar is in high spirits, a pure raga is used at several points to express Biswambhar's sense of his tradition. As the dusty, shrouded music room is opened up once more and made ready for the last time, Vilayat and Imrat Khan play a duet—a south Indian raga now used in north Indian music, which Ray very aptly describes as 'wonderfully bright-sounding'. 'That

The second jalsa, just before the storm reaches its height.



was the high point of the film, where music comes into the foreground almost.'

Not that it is ever quite allowed to take over. Even during the three *jalsas*, Ray keeps the balance between the music and the characters listening to it—otherwise the unexpected enthusiasm from foreign audiences would have turned into a more predictable reaction. He also took the precaution of casting only the best performers: Akhtari Bai from Lucknow to sing the *thumri*, Salamat Ali Khan to sing the *kheyal*, and the exquisite Roshan Kumari as the *Kathak* dancer. They are able to hold the attention of the uninformed by the sheer emotional charge and technical virtuosity of their performances. One of the rainy season ragas was chosen for the *kheyal*, which was particularly meaningful in conjunction with the storm and with Roy's emotional turmoil; and this was repeated for the astonishing dance performance too.

Though it has quite often been said that Ray shows his sympathy for the feudal order in his portrayal of Biswambhar Roy, there is not much evidence of this on the screen, other than by extrapolation from his clear contempt for the moneyed class personified by Ganguli, which has risen in India since the period depicted in the film. The zamindar, according to Eric Rhode for instance, 'is shown as the last representative of a civilisation Ray admires'. But according to Ray the film 'tries to show the inevitability of the old order being replaced by a new—but not necessarily better—system.' Certainly, there are aspects of the feudal world Ray does admire, but they are not those of, say, *Brideshead Revisited* many western admirers of the film adumbrate, that belong to a world of caste orthodoxy. 'The fact that the man doesn't know what is happening really, doesn't know the process of history, makes him a figure of pathos. He's pathetic, like a dinosaur that doesn't realise why it's being wiped out,' Ray says. 'But there is no doubt that the zamindars were real connoisseurs of music, and sponsors of music, and that musicians owed a great deal to them. Without the feudal lords music wouldn't have flourished the way it did, for long periods, starting from the Mughals.'

This brings to mind another character from a film Ray made twenty years later, Wajid Ali Shah, King of Oudh, in *The Chess Players*. Both are irresponsible men whose faults typify their class, but both are redeemed by a genuine love of music and dancing. The comparison is a revealing one; where Ray, through many small touches, convinces us of Wajid Ali's refinement and imagination, he does not entirely do so in Biswambhar's case. Despite a series of scenes in which his musicality is implied or displayed, Chhabi Biswas never quite satisfies us that he is a

connoisseur. The effect of this doubt is to bring him closer in character to the boorish Ganguli; one seems sophisticated, the other crude, to be sure, but the feeling is aroused that the difference is more one of breeding than sensibility. Once this impression lodges in the mind, one naturally assumes that Ray himself must share Biswambhar's unthinking acceptance of his profligate hubristic existence, in which love of money and prestige seems sometimes to override love of music.

The true rationale is not far to seek: like von Stroheim, who played the Prussian officer in *La Grande Illusion* with no more than a smattering of German in real life, Biswas was virtually tone-deaf. 'I discovered this rather late,' says Ray with a rueful laugh. Biswas told him he would try to act a connoisseur by producing the right facial expressions at certain points, saying 'wah-wah', shaking his head, 'looking dreamy-eyed' and so on. 'I would have used more of that, had he been musical, had it come spontaneously. But I avoided it as much as possible, because I could see his acting wasn't up to the real thing.' He did insist, though, that Biswas learn how to fake the playing of an *esraj* so that he could be seen accompanying his son's singing of scales. 'He did a very convincing job—I don't know how—through sheer grit, I think.' He also asked Biswas to do something much simpler: to lift one finger of his right hand while he was listening to the strains of dancing coming from Ganguli's house. Biswas had no idea why he was doing this, but in fact, to musical connoisseurs, this makes it clear that Roy knows the rhythmic cycle of the dance music. Later, during the mixing, it gave Ray real satisfaction to coincide the lifting of that finger with the precise beat of the music on the soundtrack.

Biswas' musical failings definitely do detract from the film and prevent it from taking a place in the first rank of Ray's oeuvre. A vital link seems to be missing. There are also a few melodramatic and perfunctory passages in the film, such as Biswambhar's discovery of his son's death, and his ride to his own death (not helped by Biswas' inability to ride and the lack of a good stuntman in Bengal). That said, *The Music Room* still has the power to mesmerise us through its music, its expressionistic lighting, its utterly convincing sets (so much so that they at first fooled the *thumri* singer Akhtari Bai), and Chhabi Biswas' monumental performance. Whether strutting around in sparkling white with a cockade and a riding crop, glancing in private at his meagre 'purse' for the dancer with disdainful resignation, subduing the vulgar Ganguli with a flick of his ivory cane, or staggering in drunken elation and depression around the music room, he is a formidable presence.

'He was keyed up to play that last scene right up to the hilt,' says Ray.



The zamindar with Toofan, the last of his horses.

'The idea of the candles going out one by one was devised on location while we were shooting. I was working like I usually do; every evening I was sitting with the script and thinking in case any fresh ideas might come for the next day's shooting. And this suddenly came to me in a flash and I described it to him. He was terribly excited; he said, "I have never come across such a brilliant and fresh and expressive idea."'

At that time he and Ray were staying at either end of a vast verandah in the palace at Nimtita. In the morning and afternoon there was shooting, and in the evening Ray would retreat to his room to study his screenplay by hurricane lamp while Biswas sat in his, steadily drinking, supplied with bottles by one of Ray's assistants. Though Ray disliked his habit, they were on very good terms, taking dinner together regularly. 'He was almost an alcoholic,' says Ray. 'He was absolutely fresh in the morning but in the evening he was insufferable—absolutely.'

One evening, a band-party had come from Murshidabad and was practising below the verandah for its performance

the following day in the film (after the *upanayan* ceremony). Ray was occasionally instructing it to play this or that piece. Suddenly he heard a loud roar from the opposite end of the verandah—'Mister Ray!' Hurrying out he saw Chhabi Biswas gesturing distractedly at the band. 'What on earth is all this?' he said scornfully. Ray told him.

'You call this a band? It possesses neither rhythm nor spirit—huh!'

'But a village wouldn't really have a good band,' Ray said with some embarrassment.

'Ugh! They can't play a thing—nothing!' Then, suddenly: 'Why don't you conduct?'

When Ray declined, Biswas himself took up the challenge. In a precise reversal of his film character, a purist who claps his hands over his ears at the sound of 'Colonel Bogey' from Ganguli's residence, he clambered on to the balustrade and began conducting with his hands above his head. 'Everything,' says Ray, 'the band, the jackals, and the crickets, was drowned out by his fortissimo "One, two, three . . . One, two, three . . ."'

Chhabi Biswas in the palace at Nimtita.



HOMEWARD BOUND

MARK MORDUE TALKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN DIRECTOR GILLIAN ARMSTRONG

Gillian Armstrong is moving backwards: the minor notes after the grand flourish, the return home to find a centre of gravity before perhaps setting out again. She's remembering filling in a magazine questionnaire at 'age 15 years and 7 months'. Like most teenagers, she wished she was thinner and had long straight hair. She felt less than perfect, less than desirable.

Some 21 years later, this almost laughably typical act of adolescent self-consciousness nevertheless helps Armstrong to begin explaining her empathy with the three once-upon-a-time teenage girls whose paths to adulthood she has sporadically recorded in the documentaries *Smokes and Lollies* (1975), *14's Good—18's Better* (1980) and the most recent instalment, *Bingo, Bridesmaids and Braces* (1988). At the age of 15 or so, Armstrong says, 'the sorting-out process begins—sexual attraction, stereotypes—you start working out what you are considered to be in society. I'm the pretty one; I'm ugly; if only I had this...'

Her father was an atheist and her mother a Protestant. The years of speech and drama classes they put her through sparked an interest in theatre and fashion, which would lead her to

leave school before her HSC in order to take up a four-year film and television course. Vague ambitions towards social work and teaching fell by the wayside, though traces of a socially conscious attitude would later run deftly through her work.

As a film student and would-be director at Swinburne College of Advanced Education in Melbourne, Gillian Armstrong was advised by a tutor that she should perhaps have more realistic ambitions, costumes or continuity. No such luck. With diploma in hand, the best she could manage for a first job was tea-girl on the shoot of Fred Schepisi's *Libido*, after which she moved north to Sydney where, as a waitress in an orange zip-up uniform, she served dim sum to film industry customers.

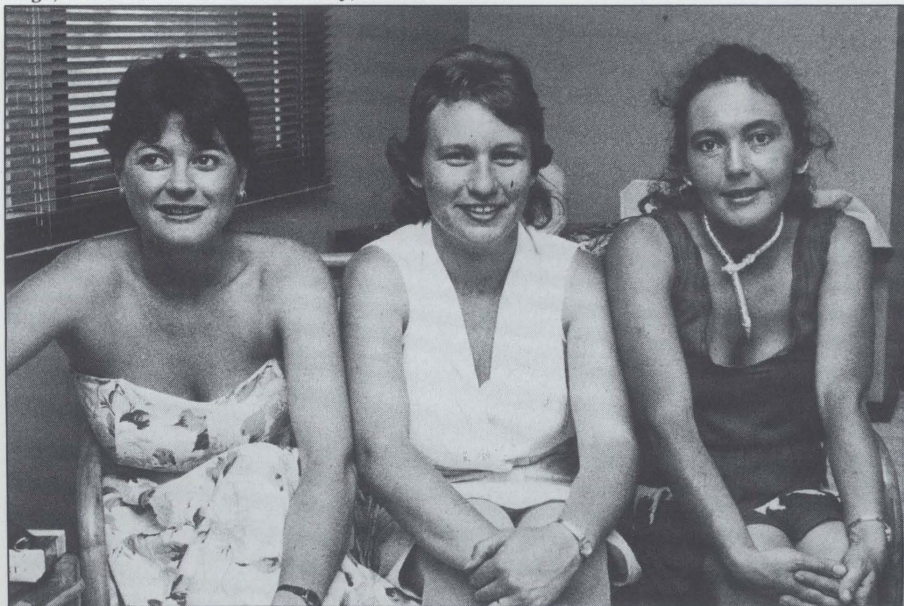
In 1972, aged 21, she applied for a place on the one-year Interim Training Scheme at the fledgling Australian Film and Television School. Armstrong, who had meanwhile secured some editing work for a commercial company, was one of 12 from a field of 750 accepted for a place in 1973. At the school, she distinguished herself with three projects. *One Hundred a Day* was based on an Alan Marshall story set in

the 30s about a girl who works in a boot factory while she slowly aborts the baby she is carrying. (Marshall later described Armstrong as 'a young person with a high purpose and a vision I envied.') After which came a documentary, *Satdee Night*, about loneliness and sex roles, designed for classroom discussion; and *Gretel*, from a Hal Porter story, which was invited to the Grenoble short film festival.

Armstrong subsequently worked as an art director on, among other films, David Williamson's *The Removalists*; then, in 1975, she was engaged by the South Australian Film Corporation to make *Smokes and Lollies*, a 25-minute documentary about the lives, thoughts and ambitions of three 14-year-old Adelaide girls. Four years later, after the Cannes success of her first feature, *My Brilliant Career*, Armstrong talked to the girls again in *14's Good—18's Better*. The documentary won an award from the Victorian Teachers' Federation and was very popular in schools; still clearly as much a source of pride to its maker

High Tide: Judy Davis.

Bingo, Bridesmaids and Braces: Kerry, Josie and Diana.





as the more glamorous success of *My Brilliant Career*.

Eight years on, and with the backing of Film Australia, Gillian Armstrong completed the third instalment of the lives of the three women—as they now are. The most recent film intercuts footage from the earlier documentaries; the girls literally grow up in front of us. *Bingo, Bridesmaids and Braces* has a counterpart in the British documentary *28 Up*, though the latter is a study of class, while the former is an exploration of female sex roles, ambitions and attitudes in an Australian working-class environment. Armstrong has avoided seeing *28 Up*, in case it unduly influences her own work. Narrower in scope, and more personal, *Bingo, Bridesmaids and Braces* allows Diana, Josie and Kerry to speak for themselves, resisting feminist stereotyping and slanted commentary.

Contrasting their lives and words, the film shows the women coping with single motherhood, surviving early marriage, reaching for the most modest

Mrs Soffel: Diane Keaton.

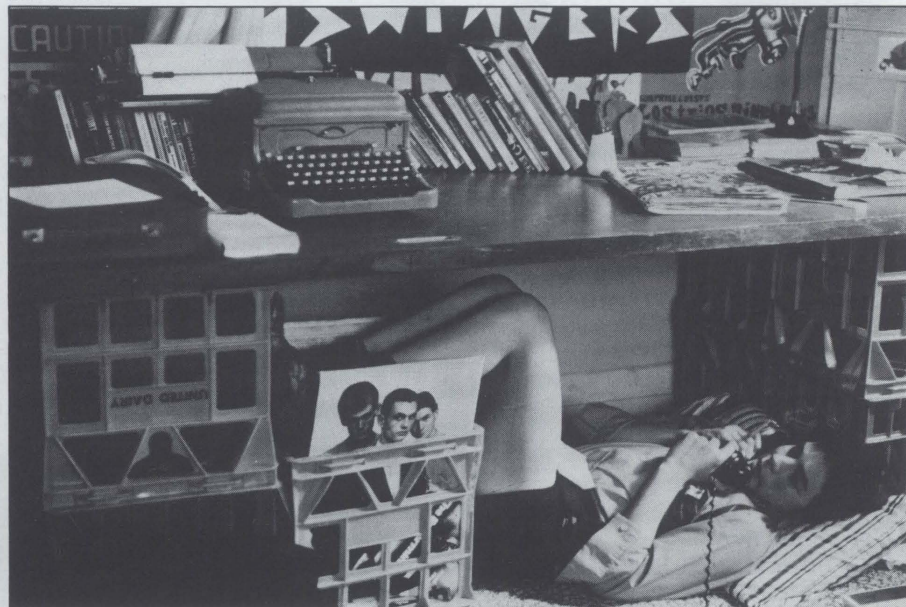


of career hopes. Yet the overall mood resists extreme pessimism and any cultivation of a victim mentality, as well as the pitfalls of middle-class voyeurism. 'The thing that's hardest for me now,' Armstrong said, 'is the fact of it even getting any publicity. I worry about journalists writing about the film. And that the women will read it. I hope people are sensitive enough when they write to realise that these are real people.'

Sitting in a coffee-shop in her home suburb of Balmain, Sydney, Gillian Armstrong is quick to defend her neighbourhood from the cliché that it's full of film-makers. 'They're all in Bondi.' Balmain is a Labour stronghold, although its working-class origins have long since mingled with the invasion of counter-culture characters looking for gentrified community comfort. If Armstrong's career movements have seemed erratic, the sideways steps have always led on to the next opportunity with a surprisingly logical, and fortuitous, grace. Balmain's character certainly suits a personal history that has seen Armstrong grapple, like many of her generation, with a post-60s consciousness and the sometimes awkward relationship between career momentum and credible artistic and social concern.

Part of the Australian film drain of the late 70s and early 80s (along with Peter Weir, Fred Schepisi, George Miller and Bruce Beresford), Gillian Armstrong went to America to make *Mrs Soffel* (1984). She joined a tiny band of women who have directed a major feature in Hollywood in the last ten years. 'I rather liked the MGM lion at the start of it,' she says, with a mixture of victoriousness and throwaway irreverence. Starring Diane Keaton and Mel Gibson, *Mrs Soffel* was the true tale of the wife of a prison warden who falls in love with one of two brothers convicted of murder, how she helps them escape, and the adventure into which they are all tragically seduced.

Starstruck.



'I was interested in an analysis of passion. I thought it must have been such a strong sexual attraction that it was like a madness. There's no logic there. It was a love story, and I had not really done a love story. *My Brilliant Career* was the opposite. That was repression, and there was never any outlet for it. She wanted to be a writer [the main character, played by Judy Davis] and there was this man...at that time, if you had those kind of feelings, you just had to marry them. They should have had a great affair and she could have gone on and written her books. It was a tragedy of their time that it couldn't happen.' Ultimately, though, Armstrong does not deal in defeat, even if the resolution of *My Brilliant Career* (the writer alone) and *Mrs Soffel* (the obsessive lover in gaol) have their bleaker undercurrents. It is progress at a hard-won price, or revelations against the grain of female roles, which usually drives her stories forward, in however fragile a way.

When Gillian Armstrong directed *My Brilliant Career* in 1978 she was 26, the first woman director to have made an Australian feature since the McDonagh sisters in the 1920s. She is not, however, greatly taken with 'first woman' accolades. She dislikes stereotyping. She appears to be a humanist first, a feminist second. 'I consider myself an individual, and so you should compare my work to that of any other filmmaker, male or female, because every artist should be different... But then again, there are things that are different about female perceptions.'

The Cannes invitation to *My Brilliant Career* and its subsequent success in America helped to put the Australian film 'Renaissance' on the international map. Offers from America rushed in at the time, but Armstrong then preferred to stay in Australia. She worked on an unrealised political drama, and then embarked on a musical comedy, *Starstruck*, featuring the then unknown Jo Kennedy (later to win a Silver Bear for

her part in *Wrong World* in 1985), as a zany girl with rock-star ambitions. The result was a mish-mash of kitsch humour, pop feminism, misconceived post-punk sentiment and some sharp character observation. Looking back, *Starstruck*'s conscious contrivances seem even more dated now than they were then; a cardboard crudity, however, that strangely appeals a lot more now, mainly due to a sense of absurdity and fun that pulls it through by the scruff of its very disposable vhs neck. And the fact that Armstrong took on a modern musical at all suggests how willingly unorthodox she is in her ambitions.

Starstruck did not deter the American offers or damage the friendship which Diane Keaton had struck up with Armstrong after seeing *My Brilliant Career*. This friendship played an important part in getting *Mrs Soffel* off the ground and later acted as a buffer against pressures from the studio once the project got under way. *Mrs Soffel* did well in the United States, given its sombre mood and difficult subject matter, and MGM offered the director a three-picture contract. She opted, however, to return to Australia. But the separation is not a divorce, and recently Armstrong has been considering two American projects, or perhaps an Australian one with the writer Peter Carey. The scope of the budgets and the excitement of working on an international scale may draw her

back to America now that she 'knows the game'.

To move from a documentary such as *Bingo*, *Bridesmaids and Braces* back to Hollywood would hardly be out of character in Armstrong's career. But from an Australian point of view it might be unfortunate, when her return home last time resulted in *High Tide*, perhaps her best film to date, and arguably her most affecting since her short feature *The Singer and the Dancer* (1976).

High Tide stars Judy Davis as Lilli, an existential drifter, Wenders-style, travelling wherever fortune or misfortune takes her along Australia's east coast. Lilli accidentally finds herself reunited with the daughter she had abandoned and a rending story unfolds of maternal ties, familial guilt and sheer modern diffidence and dissolution, the underbelly of all those 'road' myths of freedom.

Mrs Soffel had technical excellence and something of the sheen of a studio entertainment; but it pales besides *High Tide*'s greater humanity and the complexity of its multi-layered storytelling. This is a feature unmistakably made by an individual Australian woman. Gillian Armstrong 'shrank' her ambitions even further after *High Tide* to make *Bingo*, *Bridesmaids and Braces*. How many directors leave a Hollywood which still wants them, return home to make a low-budget movie, then follow it with a documen-

tary on working-class women? Not many.

There is, of course, a certain method to Armstrong's career. She has made her choices round the births of her two small children—not to mention an on-again/off-again project titled *Woman Wanted*, now indefinitely postponed due to its star Mia Farrow having her ninth child. She also took time out to film a Bob Dylan concert for the documentary *Hard to Handle*, an experience she mostly enjoyed, bar some minor squabbles over the song order. She definitely does not think Dylan another celebrity casualty in the Michael Jackson zone. 'No way. He's pretty cluey, old Bob. He just likes playing games with the media.'

Gillian Armstrong's own relationship with the media is for the moment more than sound. 'In America, *High Tide* got the best reviews I've ever had.' *Bingo*, *Bridesmaids and Braces* is a measure of her independence and commitment. 'I'm not interested in empty entertainment. It has to have some social worth or concern. But at the same time I don't want to hit people over the head with a brick. I believe even the smallest story does have content. The simplest thing. They all say something about people, even if in quite a minor way.' Diana, Josie and Kerry: small lives that keenly matter in the Australian social landscape. ■

14TH HONG KONG INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

April 6 - 21, 1990

Information: Hong Kong International Film Festival,
Level 7, Administration Building,
Hong Kong Cultural Centre,
10 Salisbury Road, Tsim Sha Tsui,
Hong Kong.
Tel.: (852) 3-7342900-6
Fax: (852) 3-665206
Telex: 38484 USDHK HX
Cable: FESTUSD HK



Presented by
the Urban Council, Hong Kong

CHINA

THE WIND AND JORIS IVENS

PETER GREEN

His life spanned almost the whole history of film. Born in Nijmegen, Holland, on 18 November 1898—in the same year as Eisenstein and René Clair—Joris Ivens was a contemporary of every subsequent generation of cinema, including our own, and a visionary of the future, as his last film, *Une Histoire de Vent* (1988), confirms.

His name is a leitmotif of cinema. He made more than sixty films. A witness and chronicler of the major conflicts of our century, he served for a brief period in the First World War and was present with his camera from the Spanish Civil War to Vietnam, from China to Cuba and Chile. During the Second World War he was invited to the United States and Canada to make films in the struggle against Fascism. He incurred the wrath of his native Holland (and the withdrawal of his passport) for his support of Indonesian independence (*Indonesia Calling*, 1946).

He collaborated with Henri Storck (*Borinage*, 1933); with Milestone and Capra; and with Hemingway (*Spanish Earth*, 1937, for which Hemingway wrote and spoke the commentary); with Jacques Prévert (*La Seine a rencontré Paris*, 1957, for which Ivens won a Palme d'Or for the best documentary at Cannes); with Godard, Resnais, Varda and others (contributing an episode to *Loin du Viêt-nam*, 1967); and finally, since 1964, with Marceline Loridan, his companion and co-author-director, with whom he made some twenty films.

His name was associated with revolutionary causes throughout the world. 'In the twentieth century, if you don't concern yourself with the problems of the world, what sort of artist are you?' he said. But Ivens was not simply an apologist for the Left. He saw 'how revolutionary leaders turned into despots', and there can be little doubt where his sympathies would have lain in the crushing of the student protests earlier this year in Peking. A life-long advocate for the oppressed, he retained his own independence of judgment to the end.

The old man (Joris Ivens)
on the moon.



Han Zhenxiang wearing the monkey mask.

A Story of the Wind describes his final journey with Marceline Loridan, an expedition 'to film the wind'—as van Gogh had attempted to paint it—that took them back to 'the land of myth, the unexpected, the unknown'. Ivens had first visited China in 1938 and had worked there with Loridan on many subsequent occasions. The film, like his life, is a journey through space and time. 'With the wind, with China and the cinema, we enter a world of myths, legends and metaphors.'

Ivens' films were always concerned with the poetry behind the political and social reality. In *A Story of the Wind* satirical pictures of modern China, with its champion gymnasts and oil rigs, its political propaganda and young pioneers and its modern mixture of Oriental and Western culture—all filmed in garish colours in the artificiality of a studio—are complemented by magical shots of the Great Wall, of trains moving like serpents through an

untouched landscape, or of the Buddha with 1,000 hands.

'I was born in the land of the wind,' Ivens remarked, and the film opens to the rasping, rhythmic beat of windmill vanes turning, rushing past the camera at close range and leaving no doubt that the beginning of his life's journey was Holland.

A host of other visual wind motifs are seen: washing flapping on a line, ripples on the surface of water, the waves of movement in a field of grass, a key tag swinging in the breeze, and the many manifestations of flight that occur in the film. The Air France jet that speeds Ivens and Loridan on their way at the beginning and end of the film is echoed now by a small, self-built airplane—little more than a frame—in a garden where a young boy calls out: 'Mama, I'm flying away to China,' as if in a dream from the past.

Then there is stillness. During the whole of Ivens' wanderings in the

desert, which form the basic continuity of the film, he waits in vain for the wind to stir. The dreams and recollections, those other journeys of the mind on which he sets out in the course of his quest, are filled with storms; but in the desert the wind eludes him until a friendly 'witch' comes to his aid.

In the film the wind is a complex metaphor for the unattainable, the human spirit, the breath of life itself, for which Ivens had to struggle as an asthmatic with half a lung. It is the 'wind of history' blowing in his back, propelling him forward—and, not least, it is a cinegenic element of movement, like water, that he used in his work from the earliest days.

The film is therefore not merely a quest to capture the face and the voice of the wind in images and sound, but a nonagenarian's attempt to take stock of life in the foreglow of death, a serious but always felicitous essay in metaphysics. 'In the course of my life I have discovered that metaphysics and dream are a form of reality and that the metaphysical is a bridge between past and future,' Ivens said.

A Story of the Wind is like the pictures of life that flash before the eyes at the moment of death. The glimpses of his own death that Ivens allows himself in the film are not moments of false pathos, however. His self-irony, the reflection of the universal in the personal and the metaphors he seeks in film and fable, impose their own objective distance.

'When the earth breathes, one calls it the wind,' a Chinese proverb says. In a courtyard an aged master of kung fu whirls his arms like an embodiment of the wind itself. Ivens wishes to know the secret of the man's breathing. It lies in the autumn wind, he replies and adds that, for Ivens, there is a link between breathing and death.

An impish figure, full of mischief, but benign, wearing the mask of a cunning ape, throws down a banana skin on which the poised kung fu master slips and falls. The figure crosses Ivens' path on a number of occasions, like the legendary monkey which is supposed to have accompanied the Buddhist monk Hsüan-tsang on his travels, warding off evil spirits.

Seated alone in the desert waiting for the wind, Ivens has a dream. One sees him walking along a path through a wilderness of stone, hand in hand with the little boy from the model plane at the beginning of the film—Ivens' childhood self. The dream fades. Ivens, seen from the rear, still seated on the crest of the sand dune, topples sideways from his chair and falls to the ground. The scene changes to a hospital. Ivens is wheeled on a trolley to an intensive care unit. The figure of the monkey appears wearing a doctor's white coat and proceeds to unroll a picture of a dragon over the entire length of Ivens' body. The window bursts open. The glass panes shatter in a sudden gust of life-giving wind.

The clay warriors: Ivens staged the sequence he was unable to film.



When he leaves the studios at the end of the scenes of everyday Chinese life, Ivens pauses in the doorway, turns to the camera with a twinkle in his eye, and reveals his own face wearing the gaudy mask of the monkey, as if their identities were momentarily merged.

Later he goes through a long, dark tunnel to a dwelling excavated in the ground. There he encounters a man with a large bunch of keys who closes the doors behind Ivens and announces: 'We have been expecting you.' The man unlocks a trunk. As the lid is raised and Ivens looks inside, the wind rushes out towards him, as if it had been trapped inside for ages. He inhales it with obvious pleasure. At the bottom of the trunk is a mask of the wind, its cheeks puffed, the head with two horn-like appendages, one representing the dragon of the south, the other the phoenix of the north. Ivens recalls how, in legend, the wind was supposed to have come out of the sea in the form of a dragon, risen into the air and turned into a bird.

The film team continues on its expedition through mountainous terrain. In one of the many remarkable visual sequences, the camera moves slowly upward, ascending a seemingly endless flight of stone steps that, like Jacob's ladder, might lead straight to heaven. The party makes its way up these steps, Ivens perched precariously on his chair fixed between two long poles that bearers carry on their shoulders. Arrived at the top of the mountain, Ivens gropes his way forward towards the edge of the precipice in a scene reminiscent of that with the blind prince at the end of Kurosawa's *Ran*.

Ivens takes us back to the beginnings of cinema, back through the eye of the camera to the spot of flickering light beyond the diaphragm. In his return to the fairy tales and simple magic of early film, he indicates a way out of the dilemma of modern cinema with its discrete genres and preoccupation with surface qualities. *A Story of the Wind*, one of the most important films of recent years, forms a hinge between past and future.

In return for the mask of the wind that has been given to him, Ivens makes a present of a copy of his own 'first love story', *The Breakers* (1929), excerpts from which he includes in the film. Later one sees documentary shots of battle scenes from the Sino-Japanese war that Ivens filmed in 1938 (*The Four Hundred Million*).

'As a film-maker, I think we have to venture into the no man's land that lies between reality and imagination, between documentation and fiction,' Ivens said. In *A Story of the Wind* he creates a compelling synthesis of documentary, travelogue, feature film and fable, dream, historical quotation, archive material and autobiography. There is no conflict between fact and fiction. The one becomes an extension of the other, 'the continuation of life with other means'. Often it is the only way of

overcoming the physical constraints imposed upon him by circumstances.

Ivens dissolves the boundaries between his real and invented worlds to such an extent that at one point we are not sure whether the vision of the moon and starry heavens over the desert is filmed on location or on a set; and the cut from the Chinese moon legend, filmed in black and white, to a night shot of coloured lights tracing the silhouettes of buildings along a waterfront is but one of the many magical moments of the film.

Recalled to life in the hospital bed, Ivens sets out on another imaginary journey. He reveals his spiritual affinity to Méliès in a quotation from one of the Frenchman's own 'voyages impossibles'—*The Journey to the Moon* (1902). Ivens, who was four years old in the year Méliès made his film, extends his homage beyond a simple quotation. Méliès' rocket sticks in the eye of the moon; the moon opens its mouth, and Ivens himself emerges. Not content with this extrapolation of Méliès' grotesque humour, however, Ivens steps out into one of the many Chinese myths in the film. He encounters a woman seated on the crescent moon—Ch'ang E, who, according to legend, fled to the moon when her husband discovered that she had stolen the pills of immortality given to him by the gods.

This interweaving of myth and reality finds one its most powerful expressions in the journey along the Great Wall of China. Ivens and Lorian come to the site of the 7,000 clay warriors guarding the grave of Emperor Shih Huang-ti. Negotiations are opened for permission to film the archaeological discoveries. The authorities are prepared to allow a total of only ten minutes of shooting time—strictly divided up and allocated to certain locations. Patiently, via an interpreter, Ivens attempts to explain the impossibility of executing the work professionally in so short a time. By the

eight day of negotiations the authorities have not budged from their offer.

After an expression of exasperation, Ivens demonstrates how necessity can truly be the mother of invention. He purchases models of the warrior figures and stages the scene he was unable to film, bringing it to life in so compelling a manner that the improvisation transcends for sheer imagination any purely documentary record he might initially have had in mind.

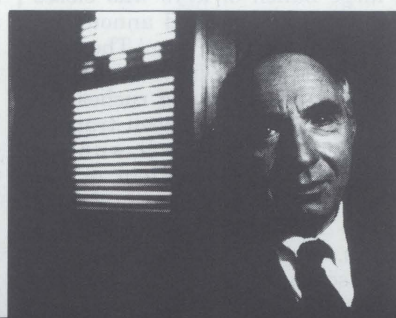
Finally, Ivens goes on to create his own new myths. The film team pitches camp in the desert to wait yet again for the wind. They set a pole in the sand and hang the dragon mask upon it, like a totem. A woman waiting outside the tent wishes to help Ivens summon the wind, he is told. In return for her services she demands, of all things, two electric fans. As if from nowhere, a man rides up on a camel with two bright blue fans slung over the back of the animal. The woman sits on the ground and proceeds to draw a magic figure in the sand. After a period of breathless waiting, one sees a fine plume of sand blowing from the crest of the dune. Slowly the surface of the desert comes alive. The two fans begin to turn in the breeze. The wind grows to gale force. The team holds fast to the tent.

The scene ends, not with a hard cut in the middle of the storm, nor with a long sequence in which the wind simply subsides. Instead, the sound of the wind is faded out and Michel Portal's spare, motoric music takes over. One sees Ivens standing alone like an Old Testament prophet on the crest of the dune beside his wooden chair, the storm blowing about him. At last he may give his asthma back to the wind, as he had always wanted to. Waving his stick in the air, unsupported, he goes down into the wind and the darkness of the dunes, out of sight. It is the last time one sees him in the film and the last time in life. Joris Ivens died in the night of 28/29 June 1989. ■

Joris Ivens and Marceline Lorian.



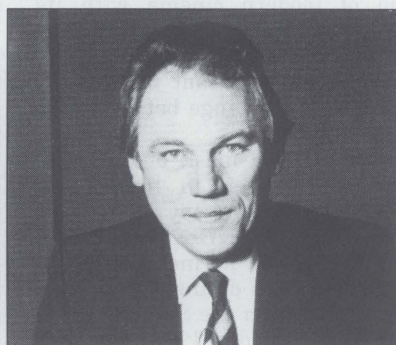
On Tuesday 1 November 1988 men, women and children throughout the British Isles were invited by the British Film Institute to record their feelings and experiences as they watched television in the course of that day. Some 2,500 people who work in television also participated.



one day in the life of T E L E V I S I O N

EDITED BY SEAN DAY-LEWIS

FOREWORD BY SIR RICHARD ATTENBOROUGH



One Day in the Life of Television is the fascinating distillation of the contributions the BFI received from thousands of critics-for-a-day. The book is unique: a candid, comprehensive view of the television industry, and the most revealing guide ever to what we really think about British television on the eve of a new age in broadcasting.

432 pages

16 pages of full colour illustrations and 90 black and white illustrations

£25 (hardback) £12.95 (paperback)

GRAFTON BOOKS



The Cook ...: Peter Greenaway, Alan Howard, Helen Mirren.

SPIT ROAST THE COOK, THE THIEF, HIS WIFE AND HER LOVER

Eating is a constant theme in the films of Alfred Hitchcock. More oddly, as Donald Spoto observed in his biography, lavatories recur to a quite obsessive degree throughout his oeuvre. During his conversations with François Truffaut, Hitchcock, the greatest of cinematic gourmets, spoke of an ambition to make a film that would portray the life of a city through its food. It would show the raw ingredients being transported into the city, their preparation and consumption, and would then conclude in the sewers.

In *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover* (Palace), Peter Greenaway has come close to fulfilling Hitchcock's ambition. In fact, he has taken it further, portraying the whole of life in terms of consumption and excretion. Greenaway himself has described the film as 'a violent and erotic love-story set in the kitchen and dining-room of a smart restaurant'. But this omits one crucial locale, the restaurant lavatory. In characteristically unflinching style, Greenaway views his subject in its totality. Food is consumed and excreted; some ingredients are lovingly and artfully prepared and cooked, others are allowed to rot.

If *Drowning by Numbers* was a film of the exterior world, shot entirely on location, the new film is a closeted, deliberately studio-bound work, shot entirely in and around one sound stage at Elstree. The film's restaurant is a domain of civilised pleasure, but it is also a Sadean refuge where force rules and everything is permitted: anything can be cooked and there is nothing that cannot be consumed in one way or another.

As in all Greenaway's films, the basic plot is straightforward. Each night the gross, violent villain, Albert Spica

(Michael Gambon), comes to dine at the elegant restaurant, La Hollandaise. Permanently in tow are his down-trodden wife Georgina (Helen Mirren) and different members of his gang, played by such actors as Tim Roth and Ian Drury. Albert indulges in what is virtually a monologue, brutal and scatological, in which he insults and abuses all around him. His most delicate, edgy relationship is with the chef of La Hollandaise, played by the French actor Richard Bohringer (most familiar in Britain, perhaps, from *Diva*).

Georgina catches the eye of another of the regular patrons, Michael (Alan Howard), who sits silently reading at his table. They begin a passionate sexual affair which takes place, until the end, entirely within the precincts of the restaurant. This affair consists of virtually nothing but a series of couplings, first in a cubicle of the ladies' lavatory, then in the kitchen and the restaurant's ample store-rooms. Finally, on the verge of discovery, they flee naked into the cold-store and escape in a truck full of rotting meat.

The proceedings are dominated, presided over, by Michael Gambon, who unites the film's two sides, part gangster movie, part revenge tragedy. Spica is a spray-cartoon of a gangster. He is like a big psychopathic child, smearing one of his victims with dog shit in the opening sequence, gleefully outdoing a long line of misogynist gangsters by pushing a fork into the cheek of a girl. He's also a theatrical Jacobean villain, with the gang as his depraved courtiers and the curtained dining-room as the stage where he finally receives his deserts.

The other three actors all stand in contrast to Gambon's towering central presence. Where he is coarse, Helen

Mirren is painfully vulnerable. Where he is verbose and fluent, Richard Bohringer is restrained, not least by his thick French accent. And where he is loud, Alan Howard, one of the most self-effacing of actors, is virtually silent, speaking his first words halfway through the picture, and then almost in a whisper.

It's a fascinating story, but as with the earlier films, I'm not entirely convinced by the script. Greenaway's titles are more brilliant than those of any other film-maker. (They are also a problem for the reviewer since they are so long, and so difficult to shorten. *Belly? Zed? Cook?*) But the language in the films rarely lives up to them, or to the dazzling visual imagery they accompany. I wish Greenaway had found a co-writer to lend more interest to Michael Gambon's rants, more lyricism to the film's moments of love and revenge, more substance to the pivotal role of the Cook.

These shortcomings, though, are made up for by the visual style which embodies the film's true narrative. Greenaway is often seen as a director intoxicated with ideas, but his true obsession is the failure of ideas when they run up against the stubborn tyranny of the real world. His idealists are constantly thwarted: by power in *The Draughtsman's Contract*; by physical decay in *A Zed and Two Noughts*; by illness in *The Belly of an Architect*.

As with Greenaway's earlier films, *Cook* features a good deal of nudity, but the naked bodies are viewed in a strangely detached style. For a story about appetite, this is a startlingly un-erotic film. Mirren and Howard lie together among the meat and poultry and their bodies come to seem like fleshy constraints, emblems of their possessors' failure to achieve transcendence.

The production design, by Ben Van Os and Jan Roelfs (also responsible for *Zed and Two Noughts* and *Drowning by Numbers*), is magnificent and there are moments in their collaboration with the photographer Sacha Vierny when the film touches greatness. Each area of action, the kitchen, the dining-room and the lavatory, has a different design and colour scheme, and the actors' extravagant Jean-Paul Gaultier costumes change colour as they move between them. The different rooms also seem to represent different stages of history, an architectural mockery of human progress. The kitchen with its still lives and its fowl being dismembered is eighteenth century, the dining-room with its lush fabrics nineteenth century and the hi-tech bathroom late twentieth.

Greenaway's last three films, made with the help and boldness of his Dutch producers, are among the most original visual experiments since Powell and Pressburger's great years. With increasing resources and skill, Greenaway has

taken old forms—the murder story, the thriller—dismantled them and put them back together to make something entirely new. It's a perilous project and filmgoers must keep their fingers crossed. British visionaries have a way of going terribly wrong, witness the course of Nicolas Roeg's career. But Greenaway is now beyond question the most exciting intelligence at work in our cinema.

SEAN FRENCH

1968 REVISITED MELANCHOLIA

'You wake up one morning, and you know you're lost.' An expatriate German approaching middle age in the comfortable niche he has built as a London art critic, David Keller (Jeroen Krabbé) is already uneasily aware of a sense of self-betrayal when 1968 abruptly resurfaces through a telephone call from Hamburg. A Chilean military torturer is ripe for extermination; in three weeks time, attending a conference in London, this Vargas will present a perfect target. Can David live up to the militant political idealism of his youth and carry out the execution?

Not exactly a pristine theme in these days of conservative retrenchment, with the political utopianism of the 60s choking on the blood of terrorist violence in the 70s. Yet Andi Engel's *Melancholia* (BFI) not only avoids all the pitfalls of *déjà vu*, it manages to live up to the implications of its title without ever for a moment wallowing in gloomy self-flagellation. Given that this is a first feature, deliberately trailing a teasing autobiographical context in that Engel is himself a German expatriate who graduated from political involvement in Berlin to leading art house film distributor in London, one might reasonably expect something like a dark night of the soul.

Instead, what we get is a film of cool, witty irony, exposing its emotions only through indirections. When David Keller, a purely theoretical militant even twenty years ago, receives the telephone call from his old friend Manfred (Ulrich Wildgruber), who turns the screw of persuasion by referring to Keller's former profession of faith ('Violence may be the only way'), Keller's natural hesitation before the act of murder is given a further twist from another direction: his sometime mistress Catherine (Susannah York), misinterpreting his uneasy preoccupation, offers him free use (with additional financial inducement) of the family villa in Tuscany as a retreat where he can at last settle down to serious work on the book he has always been meaning to write. This gesture of generosity looms as a sort of hand of fate, pointing the way to wipe the slate clean.

He decides to accept the task as a clear case of necessary cleansing of evil. But nothing comes for nothing in this world which isn't yet utopia (even Catherine's offer of the villa is made because she wants the use of his London flat for a young Australian friend). First, his preparations for change are attended by the discovery, through a conversation with Catherine's teenage daughter Rachel (Kate Hardie), herself lightly contemplating violence as a member of the Animal Liberation Front, that his liaison with her mother is not the secret he had assumed it to be. Then, trailing an unvoiced sense of betrayal of the cuckolded husband, he is himself betrayed when Manfred appears in person to countermand the execution. It seems that Vargas plans to use the conference to put himself on the side of the angels by making public certain unsavoury facts about the American involvement in El Salvador, and the political value of his death is therefore outweighed by his potential as a live irritant.

The fascinating and slightly unnerving aspect of this thriller, unravelling a personal crisis in which Keller negotiates a matter of life and death with the imperturbable calm of a chess grandmaster (and incalculable maelstroms of fear, doubt and guilt just stirring the surface), is that Engel conducts it with the unhurried drawing-room placidity of a five act comedy of manners. With each act set on successive Fridays, the first three centre on the telephone call, the decision to act, and the cancellation of the contract. Intervening between the third and fourth Fridays, however, is a crucial encounter between Keller and Sarah Yelin (Jane Gurnett), widow of one of Vargas' most recent victims.

Her plea is for the justice of personal vengeance, an appeal all the more persuasive in that her terrible story (of

miscarriage after being forced to watch her husband being tortured to death) is couched in terms redolent of lucid historical hindsight rather than immediate emotional hysteria. Their mutual sense of having been used by Manfred, manipulated as puppets in pursuit of his devious political ends, fuses in Keller's mind with the delicately shifting network of emotions that has gradually been expanding into an awareness of his whole life as an escalating sequence of small betrayals, and sparks the moral certainty that Vargas must die.

The fourth Friday is the time of action. Keller's methodical enactment of the perfect murder, bludgeoning Vargas to death in his hotel room with a length of scaffold tubing borrowed from a building site, is followed by its logical corollary: a detour to Hamburg en route for Tuscany, there to despatch Manfred equally efficiently and equally dispassionately with a heavy marble ashtray. With the fifth Friday comes the reckoning: a strange, sad moment of desolation when Keller finally reaches his haven in Florence, only to have his confidence in moral absolutes shattered by Sarah Yelin's reaction to his actions: happy to learn that justice has been served on Vargas, she queries the less personal necessity of Manfred's death.

As elusively reticent as the rest of the film (with Denis Crossan's stunning camerawork turning familiar London into an unfamiliar no man's land of hostile light and friendly darkness), this final point in Keller's odyssey marks his arrival in a personal abyss. Alone in a room in an empty house in a deserted landscape, he comes face to face with the melancholy truth that idealism died in 1968, killed off by the amoeba-like growth of cynical political expediency.

TOM MILNE

Melancholia: Jeroen Krabbé.



GIFTS OF THE MAGI NEW YORK STORIES

In filming literature, it's almost axiomatic that the short story is a better source than the novel. It allows for expansion and elaboration, making a spectacle of the point; a great deal of effort does not have to go into finding short cuts to the point. When the movies themselves go in for short stories, the problems of compression and short-cutting return, perhaps because the cinema is naturally discursive, depending on a build-up of evidence, of images, rather than a whittling away to a single image, irony or emotion. The problems are variously manifest in *New York Stories* (Warner Bros), and it's no surprise that the most successful of the three tales ('Oedipus Wrecks') is directed by Woody Allen. This may have something to do with the fact that Allen has become less cinematic the more accomplished he has become as a film-maker, determinedly preserving his roots not only in New York, but in the *New Yorker* sketch form in which he began.

His title conjures the classic Jewish mother joke ('Oedipus Schmoedipus'), and what follows is that joke infused with Allen's personal iconography. The sketch begins with a psychiatrist, to whom Arnold Mills (Allen) is confessing that, although he has successfully passed into an *echt* WASP law firm, and tried to detach himself from his background by truncating his name (from Millstein), he is still plagued by his mother's smothering ways. When mother mysteriously disappears during a magic show, guilt gives way to a sense of release; until the day she reappears, funnier and more awesome than anything in *Ghostbusters*, as a nagging apparition in the skies of Manhattan.

If this is classic *New Yorker* Allen, it might seem dismayingly old-fashioned in terms of his film career, a return to the skits of *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex*. But the 'mother in the sky' is also akin to the movie conceits of the later Allen, to the absconding screen hero of *The Purple Rose of Cairo* or the compulsively assimilating one of *Zelig*. Into these sophisticated effects, the movies themselves disappear, leaving in their place their creator's elemental fears of non-existence, non-acceptance. Arnold having his childhood bedwetting discussed on the evening news is the ultimate nightmare of public exposure, worse than the dinner guest who turns into a rabbi in *Annie Hall*.

The city as a personal, thoroughly internalised landscape of the author/hero's fears is the one thing the Allen sketch has in common with Martin Scorsese's opening story 'Life Lessons', in which painter Lionel Dobie (Nick Nolte) seems, in his vitality and



'Life Lessons': Painter and protégée.
'Oedipus Wrecks': Mother and son.

despair, so plugged into the energy circuits of New York that disconnection would mean death. In fact, so much does Lionel insist on this, particularly when his protégée Paulette (Rosanna Arquette) starts making angry noises about quitting him and the city, that one suspects the vignette is partly a parody of the Big Apple love story.

It might be truer, however, to say that 'Life Lessons' is inevitably a parody of a Scorsese movie, mainly because so much of past Scorsese is jostling for entry. The way the story chooses to exit, with an iris shot closing on Lionel as he goes into his pitch about offering 'life lessons' to another admirer at another opening, certainly has the ironic neatness of O. Henry. But that is not the same as the spiralling conclusion of a truer Scorsese: those tales of heroes convinced of damnation relentlessly pursuing redemption. 'Life Lessons', in a sense, gives us too much Scorsese for the piece to work on its own terms: something of *Raging Bull* in the way Lionel attacks his giant canvases, and just as fiercely attacks whatever his gaze fixes on (another iris shot as he contemplates Paulette's bare foot); something of *The Color of Money* (also scripted by Richard Price) in the agonies of the older man trying to hold his own against the competition ('Are you a graffiti artist?' he warily asks one pick-up of Paulette's); and touches of the comedy of frustration of *After Hours* in

the pixillated menace of the details of New York night life.

The middle episode, 'Life Without Zoe', on the other hand, gives us rather less than we might expect of Francis Coppola. It has been set up on a premise true enough to the film-maker—creating a project that is then allowed an evolution of its own, to go where it will, the resulting film to some extent being about how it got there—which on this occasion does not take us very far. 'Life Without Zoe' was written with Coppola's 17-year-old daughter Sofia, who designed the costumes as well, while Coppola's actress sister Talia Shire and composer father Carmine also take part: the generosity and the 'family' context being further true elements. But the resulting fantasy—about children playing semi-adults in a world from which the real adults have abdicated—involves a degree of feigned naivety, of willed frivolity, that is fatal to this kind of project.

From her cosseted isolation in the Sherry Netherland hotel, Zoe (Heather McComb) conceives two fairy-tale schemes: to reconcile her estranged, globetrotting parents, and to restore a fabulous jewel to an Eastern princess, who gave it to Zoe's father, a renowned and dangerously seductive flautist, and must have it back before her husband, the king, finds out. Coppola has abetted his daughter in dressing New York for a cod *Arabian Nights* fable, but the result is not one from the heart, and if a Coppola film, even in miniature, is not that it is little else.

'New York is almost an unnamed character in the story,' Coppola is quoted in the production notes, giving the predictable rationale for this three-way urban cross-section. Producer Robert Greenhut—who was originally approached by Woody Allen with the idea of his doing three short stories himself—echoes the notion that all the film-makers have in common is the city. 'We originally talked about having three different approaches with a theme running through them all, but I thought it would be more interesting not to have this, since we didn't want to pre-empt any ideas that the directors might offer us.'

On the contrary, all three seem to have found their way to a common theme—love's labours lost, or strangely diverted—and might be judged more by what they have done with that than by what they have shown of New York. Coppola ends with a quaintly qualified fairy-tale tag, 'And we all lived happily—so far—ever after,' Scorsese with a picture of the romantic artist as helpless victim of his own impulses, and Allen on the most bitter-sweet note of all, as Arnold finds that race, boiled chicken, and mother hovering over the Chrysler building will inevitably shape his heart's desire.

RICHARD COMBS

SOLDIERS PAY CAMP DE THIAROYE

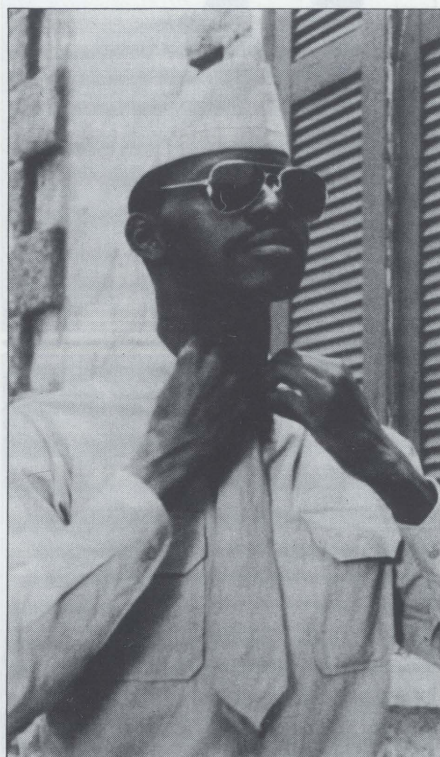
1944: Fresh from the war in Europe, a detachment of West African infantrymen, dressed in borrowed American uniforms, disembarks at the port of Dakar. They have the unmistakable bearing of free men. But in Senegal, of course, where it seems the French military authorities have been kicking their heels since the war began, the egalitarian rules to which the African troops have grown accustomed do not apply. Billeted at a transit camp, they are required in due course—nothing happens very quickly in this colonial backwater—to surrender their smart, casual uniforms and put on the baggy pants and shapeless red caps of the African servant boy.

Camp de Thiaroye (Metro), Ousmane Sembène's first feature film since *Ceddo* was banned in his native Senegal some twelve years ago, is on one level a straightforward and from a Senegalese point of view, one imagines, relatively uncontroversial correction of the historical record. The food at the transit camp is abominable; a protest by the troops, a number of whom are devout Muslims, wins the day. (Cue for a close-up of a goat having its throat cut, gratuitous in western, but not presumably in African terms.) The question of the conversion of the soldiers' pay is, however, more fundamental, and touches a raw nerve with the deskbound military authorities.

The troops, who have seen a fair share of combat (as did the young Sembène as a sharpshooter with the Free French Army), have been paid in French francs which are non-negotiable in colonial Africa. The authorities first insult the soldiers by accusing them of robbing the dead (how could these feckless 'childlike' blacks have saved all their pay, and, come to that, actually banked it in the suitcase of one of their number?) and then refuse point blank to pay the going exchange rate.

The infantrymen—the *tirailleurs*—revolt, taking the French commanding officer hostage, but later, since they are after all children, innocently accept the word of this officer of the French Empire that he will in fact pay them their due. That night, after the local Senegalese soldiers have diplomatically been sent home, the remainder, at last sensing that they about to see their villages in Gabon, Niger and the Ivory Coast, rejoice with unbuttoned exuberance: a moment memorialised in a long naturalistic take at odds with the rather studied formalism of the rest of the picture. Whereupon, after everyone has gone to bed, the French artillery rumbles into position and without preliminaries destroys the camp.

From a West European point of view, *Camp de Thiaroye*, which opened in



Camp de Thiaroye: Ibrahima Sane.

London in the same week as *Bull Durham* and the revival of *Gone With the Wind*, faces a stony, uphill path. Co-directed by Thierno Faty Sow, a charter member of the Panafrican Film-makers Federation, and co-produced by Senegal, Tunisia and Algeria, the picture is both long (152 minutes) and leisurely; and at times didactic in the manner of a classroom discussion in which everyone is allowed his say, at length. The staging of the massacre has drawn no lessons from post-60s Hollywood: crowds of unarmed soldiers burst from their barracks and hare from right to left, left to right; shells explode and the players cast themselves enthusiastically on the ground.

What distinguishes this film, however, and gives it both significance and a singular dignity is the central performance by Ibrahima Sane, as the intellectual *tirailleur*, Sergeant-Major Diatta, and its profound sense of the look and feel of a corner of West Africa. How in a way the empty, ancient landscape determines the pace and tone of life for its native inhabitants, and how this pace and tone is so frustratingly incomprehensible to the colonial administrators.

Diatta is the odd man out of the *tirailleurs*. He intercedes with the French authorities; but when real action is called for yields to elected officials from each of the national groups making up the detachment. He listens to western classical music on his

wind-up gramophone; the war has interrupted his law studies in Paris; he displays a photograph of his French wife and their small daughter; on his bookshelf is *Le Silence de la Mer*. It is not reading too much into this character to see in him, and Ibrahima Sane plays the part with elegant, unruffled calmness, a portrait of the principled young Sembène, the one-time union organiser of the Marseille waterfront who went on to write, among other books in French, *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu*, a novel set against the 1947-48 French railway strike.

Unlike most of the other characters, black and white, Diatta is not a cipher. He does not despise the French, or the Americans who at one point mistakenly break his arm and lock him up as an uppity Negro *ci*. He values French culture, indeed sensibly wishes to profit from it; and, one suspects, his admiration of Charlie Parker does not depend on an identification with him as a fellow black. He has learnt the royal value of politeness, silence and passive resistance: he possesses a quiet nobility, which has absolutely nothing to do with noble innocence.

Camp de Thiaroye is flecked with very dry humour. On the Dakar quayside, for instance, Diatta introduces his uncle, a tall man in a purple robe made even taller by an incongruous felt hat with a feather (the hat was surely destined for a Bavarian beer-drinker), to his comrade Captain Raymond, a sympathetic Frenchman who commanded the *tirailleurs* in Europe and is untainted with colonial attitudes. The uncle, however, wants nothing to do with any Frenchman: they razed Diatta's native village and killed his parents. With an ineffable weariness the tall man gives the perplexed Raymond the most peremptory of limp handshakes and then looks vacantly away. As unanswerable insults go, it's a classic, and dry as parchment.

The camp itself is set in the middle of a vacant nowhere-land, its new sand-coloured huts blending with the surrounding landscape, which is dotted with scrub and huge gnarled immemorial trees. Dakar, into which Diatta rambles on an inconclusive outing to a French brothel, *Le Coq Hardi*, where he gives the game away in his American uniform by ordering a Pernod, is equally vacant: wide streets in which a marching column seems lost; few inhabitants, the somewhat ridiculous French civilians scurrying uneasily about their business; the feeling of a place where something is waiting to happen but never will. For the French, apart from the gallantly unerotic *Coq Hardi*, the only place to go is the club, and even there the air is suffused with a dismal inconsequentiality. A notable picture which in fifty years will still have much to say.

JOHN PYM

BLACKASS TALK DO THE RIGHT THING

The place: Bedford Stuyvesant, a poor black district of Brooklyn. The time: the hottest day of the New York summer. The action: a little edge of racial tension that stupidly and yet somehow inevitably becomes a riot. Spike Lee's new film, *Do the Right Thing* (UIP), observes all the classical unities but refuses quite to be a tragedy. Sure enough there's a death, but the person who dies is not the hero. More importantly, that death is not inevitable, and the point of the film is to question the process which made it seem so.

The action centres around Sal's Famous Pizzas joint. Sal is an Italian immigrant, who has built up his business in Bed-Stuy over twenty-five years, likes the place, likes the people and has no intention of quitting. Sal is not a racist, but he is a sort of cultural nationalist and he decorates his joint exclusively with pictures of Italian and Italian-American heroes, from Rocky Marciano to Sophia Loren. It is Sal's 'Wall of Fame' combined with the class and racial attitudes of his eldest son, Pino, which provide the provocation for the eventual riot.

The film's hero (sort of) is Mookie, played by Spike Lee himself. Mookie has a three-year-old son, whom he does not support. He is charming, feckless, unwilling to settle down with the boy's mother, and he has never had a proper job: he is now working as Sal's delivery boy for \$250 a week. Mookie is peaceable and gets on with everybody except the graceless Pino. It is therefore somewhat shocking—to the audience, but also to the other characters—when he picks up the garbage can and throws it at Sal's window to set off the looting which is the climax of the film.

On the black side, the stirrer is Buggin' Out, a would-be activist who first fails and then eventually succeeds in making an issue of the Wall of Fame. Buggin' Out wants black pictures on the wall, since all the customers are black, and he has a point but of a quite utopian kind. Sal's Famous Pizzas is Sal's private property. Sal is only in Bed-Stuy because he wants to run a business to pass on to his children. More than his whiteness, or his Italianness, that Wall of Fame represents Sal's rights as a property owner. In a sense, the whole American system is invested in that wall, and Buggin' Out is in no position to take on the system, nor is he smart enough to understand why.

Most of the other characters understand all too well the limitations on their power to act, and Buggin' Out's call for a boycott of Sal's gets no community support ('Boycott, man, you should boycott the barber who fucked up your hair style,' says one member of the chorus of bystanders). Eventually,



Do the Right Thing: Spike Lee.

round about midnight on a hot evening when Sal has opted out of friendliness to stay open later than usual, an incongruous team of three turns up to challenge him about the pictures on his wall. These are Buggin' Out, a loner called Radio Raheem whose self-esteem is entirely tied up in his ghetto-blaster, and the half-witted Smiley, who spends his day handing out pictures of a meeting between Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. Sal objects to the noise of the ghetto-blaster and, when Raheem won't turn it down, smashes it with a baseball bat. Raheem attacks Sal. The cops come and in the fighting a white cop throttles Raheem with his nightstick. Stunned silence follows. Then Mookie picks up that garbage can, Sal's is looted and burnt. Smiley puts his picture of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King up on the charred Wall of Fame.

The violence, though unwanted, is curiously cathartic. It has the effect of bringing the community to its senses, making people more aware of their responsibilities towards each other. Enemies are reconciled. Mookie looks set to get back together with Tina and their son. The film then closes with two long quotations about violence, one from Martin Luther King arguing that it is always degrading, and one from Malcolm X declaring that it may sometimes be necessary. There is something both sententious and sentimental about this ending (as there is about the ending of Lee's earlier *School Daze*), as if the audience needed to be cheered up

and enlightened at the same time. The ending also gives the impression that the film is about violence, when actually it is about impotence, frustration and the sense of being nowhere and getting nowhere. Although the film is constructed to lead up to a violent ending, that ending is contrived—for the sake of the catharsis, not because violence is either endemic in the situation or a key political issue. The two quotations represent opposed points of view which are, in a sense, equally irrelevant.

The problem for Lee, I would argue, is that he seems intent on making a drama out of a situation which is inherently undramatic. The Bedford Stuyvesant of the film is a listless, dissociated community, unstructured and purposeless. A few people work, more are on welfare. Everyone is aware of being black, which is a shared condition making them different from cops (white or Hispanic) and shopkeepers (Italian or Korean). There is a lot of talk about being black and bandying about of terms of endearment such as blackass. But there is no black consciousness or political struggle. Raheem has his music, Smiley has his icons, Buggin' Out has his pose, but for everyone in the film life is mostly a matter of carrying on. There is a great deal of cultural energy, which has to do with blackness. But there is nothing black people can do except banter about things in general and blackness in particular.

So long as the film sticks to the level of recording the entropic energy and the diffuse impotence of community life in Bedford Stuyvesant it is both funny and—I would say—truthful. When it tries to become a drama and to use that drama to underscore its own truthfulness, it falls into a trap and manages to undermine its point rather than underline it. Bed-Stuy and places like it need a new politics that relates to the new situation and is neither that of King nor that of Malcolm, just as the students of *School Daze* need a politics that is neither separatist nor integrationist.

Lee does not know what this politics will be like, but he is aware of the problem and honest enough to put both the problem and his ignorance of the solution on the agenda. What he cannot do is articulate his consciousness of the political problem into a narrative form. For all its apparent roughness, *Do the Right Thing* is aesthetically very sophisticated, particularly in the first half. But at the end it collapses both aesthetically and politically because on both fronts it is seeking a closure which denies everything that is specific and novel about what has come before. If Lee finds an aesthetic solution in his next film, it will probably be a sign that, he and the characters of his film, are nearer a political solution as well.

GEOFFREY NOWELL-SMITH



CANADA HOUSE SALUTES THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA

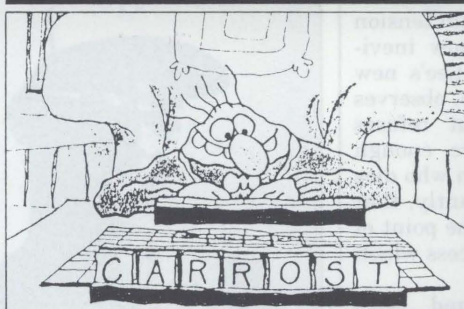
ON ITS



50th ANNIVERSARY 1939 - 1989

17,000 Productions 3,000 Awards

"the eyes of Canada"



THE BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE PRESENTS IN ASSOCIATION WITH LICHTBLICK FILMPRODUKTION

JEROEN KRABBE AND SUSANNAH YORK

melancholia

15

**you hit 40
you're washed up
either you kill or you're dead**

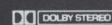
directed by **andi engel**
produced by **colin maccabe**

written by **andi engel** and **lewis rodia**
co-producer **helga bähr**
executive in charge of production **jill pack**
associate producer **katy radford**
director of photography **denis crossan**
production designer **jock scott**
costume designer **annie curtis jones**
editor **christopher roth**
music by **simon fisher turner**
starring **jeroen krabbe, susannah york**
ulrich wildgruber, jane gurnett
kate hardie, saul reichlin

ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK ON SILVA SCREEN COMPACT DISC



A BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE PRODUCTION IN ASSOCIATION WITH LICHTBLICK
FILMPRODUKTION AND CHANNEL FOUR TELEVISION, NDR, FILM FONDS HAMBURG, AND HAMBURGER FILMBÜRO



SEEING LIFE

**THE HIDDEN CINEMA
British Film Censorship
in Action 1912-1972**by James C. Robertson
Routledge/£30

No one has to learn to read his own society so sensitively, so intently, as a censor: neither monarch nor parliamentarian, nor priest, nor merchant. These all have to observe trends and altering attitudes in order to influence them, but it is the censor who really has to use the fine measure and be always conscious of the minutiae of attitude and belief as these evolve in the flux of social time.

And when the really broad shifts and changes occur, it is always the censor who feels himself to be unfairly treated, the misunderstood victim of his own misreadings of altered possibilities. After all, it is the censor, the only formal legislator of a people's imagination, who has everything to lose when a society abandons its nostrums, inhibitions, standards, or intensifies them.

No form of censorship has been so well documented as that of film in the twentieth century. There are certainly many gaps in the records of the censors' debates and in the archives of excised materials, but we have—in Britain at any rate—in the records of the British Board of Film Censors (today changed to Classification) a remarkable documentation of the inside story of popular cultural control, dating back before World War One.

James C. Robertson has previously provided us with a general history of British film censorship in the mid-century. In this new volume, he provides a wonderful additional resource for the social as well as the cinema historian to chew over. He simply gives an account, film by film, of the fights between film-makers, censors and pressure groups over all the cinema works which were banned or hacked about from 1913 until the end of the 1960s, when the social logic of the old constraints fell away. Apart from preface and epilogue, the book is therefore a catalogue of censors' tales.

Consider the hoo-haa when Chaplin disguised himself as a woman in a movie in 1915; when Annette Kellerman's bosom slipped into view in 1916; when someone made an anti-war movie in 1917; when a film questioning the official version of the circumstances surrounding the death of Lord Kitchener was similarly totalled. Then remember that the same institution, even some of the same officials,

came to handle the problems posed by *The Wild One* and by Ken Russell's *Devils* much nearer our own time.

This very useful study brings out the full extent of the paradoxes as each generation of battles fought in or through the BBFC quickly shrivels into faded, even ridiculous contretemps, the moment the circumstances of society alter—from peace to war, from gerontocracy to youth culture, from cinema monopoly to television competition, from long skirts to the mini. At one instant the barriers seem impenetrable, eternal fences against the unthinkable; in a moment they have vanished like film sets, and the same institution is laying down the law on some other previously unimpeached taboo.

There is scarcely any inhibition foisted upon the culture of the moving image which lasts longer than a decade and some that become embarrassments in two or three. And yet right through, until today, when the duties of the BBFC have expanded to cover video and the organisation has become statutory rather than voluntary, we have had in Britain a single flow of delicate judgments emanating from a single continuing source. Many of the leading figures of the BBFC remained in office into their eighties, several for over thirty years. The job is a hiding to nothing at the best of times; but, one must admit, to have presided over the moral hysterics of the last seventy years has at least been to see life, of a kind. The Wilkinsons and the Trevelyan, hapless servants of a permanent revolution, have been obliged to diet upon their own cuts and caveats.

What strikes one most about this cavalcade of cuts is that, while the subject matter has remained relatively stable (there was an attempted film about VD in 1915 and many dealing with drugs, birth control, prostitution, even before the talkies), it is the phenomenon of explicitness that has come increasingly to concern the censors and politicians.

Where, for example, cruelty to children was once banned as a theme (it was 'prohibitive' as Mrs Crouzet, the early censorine, would have put it) today our anxieties are about inches of flesh, decibels of screaming, ounces of blood. The whole function of censorship, it seems, has become a question of drawing complicated boundaries between authenticity and voyeurism.

In its first decades the BBFC came to occupy, with considerable though varying success, the role of Editor in Chief of the British cinema experience; it defined permitted themes, explained to producers and writers how to shape their narratives to

meet its requirements, negotiated with governments over complicated diplomatic questions, defined the terms of representation in a sense of all the relationships within society (between pupils and teachers, police and workers, parents, neighbours, governments and governed, etc); but it came to perform a quite different and far more maddening task—that of deciding what, in any season, had come to be the acknowledged boundary of the voyeuristic, varying from age-group to age-group.

There are two things I find slightly irritating about this book. One is that Mr Robertson seems not to grasp the connection between the British Film Institute and the National Film Archive, about which he makes many well-deserved congratulatory remarks. The other is that he keeps interposing a rather crass politics in setting out his account of events—the 'Left' and the 'Right' are always demanding this and doing that, as if the British nation since 1913 had been bifurcated into two rather boring clubs, quarrelsome breaking their eggs at opposite ends, or rowing in an incessant university boat race. To write history against a crude and procrustean image of that kind is daft. Other than that, however, this is a fascinating piece of work, necessary reading for all researchers, salutary for all film-makers and filmgoers, thought-provoking for all censors.

ANTHONY SMITH

EMPERORS

**AN EMPIRE OF THEIR OWN
How the Jews Invented
Hollywood**by Neal Gabler
W. H. Allen/£14.95

'We need not two or three books on Hitchcock and Ford,' wrote Peter Wollen in 1969, 'but many, many more.' He might have said the same about histories of Hollywood; but, the time being what it was, he didn't. In the intervening years, the demand for studies of Hitchcock and Ford appears inexplicably to have shrunk. But, to judge by publishers' lists, not the demand for histories of Hollywood. Perhaps this has to do with a sense of increasing urgency: mortality is fast eliminating those whose memories and reflections on even Hollywood's gold and silver eras—the 1930s and 40s—can still be mined by the assiduous researcher.

Mainly, though, it has been a commercial decision: books about the rich and the bitchy have consistently sold well in

the Reagan/Thatcher era. Indeed, by now, the history of Hollywood has been pretty well served—and not just by researchers with tape-recorders, either. There are novels: Andrew Bergman's thriller *Hollywood and Levine* is a worthy companion to such classics as *Day of the Locust* and *The Last Tycoon*.

Biographies like Bob Thomas' *King Cohn* (about Harry) and Mel Gussow's *Don't Say Yes Until I Finish Talking* (about Darryl F. Zanuck) tell us almost all we need to know about how Hollywood worked, as do autobiographies like Sterling Hayden's *Wanderer*. Sadly, though, in a field in which the rule appears to be that it doesn't matter how banal the story so long as those appearing in it are famous, there have been very few books like *Wanderer*, the sharpest, bitterest and best written of the bunch. And, lest we forget what the entertainment business is really all about, there are always Kenneth Anger's two books, which should be on every Film Studies reading list.

Of course, there has been the serious stuff, too: the work of David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson and, for the more general reader, exhaustive (if rather ponderous) studies such as Joel W. Finler's *The Hollywood Story*, brilliant bits of investigative journalism like David McClintick's *Indecent Exposure* (about the David Begelman scandal), and such chunks of special pleading as Steven Bach's *Final Cut* (about *Heaven's Gate*) which, in the interstices of its endless self-justification, paints a memorable portrait of the corporate side of cinema. Most recently, there has been Otto Friedrich's *City of Nets*, with its withering new perspectives borne of the fact that Friedrich is not, primarily, a writer on film and is thus free from the ingrained nostalgia which few of the rest of us ever entirely shake off.

With this growing heap of anecdote and analysis, serious study and scandal-mongering, the opportunity for reviewers to use that phrase that ensures them a mention on the back cover of the paperback—the best book ever written about Hollywood—has all but vanished. Not that I would, even twenty years ago, have been tempted to use it about Neal Gabler's *An Empire of Their Own*, though it is, in its way, very good indeed: thorough, intelligent and consistently readable.

Not for Gabler Otto Friedrich's despairing resolution: 'No more interviews. Surely there is no one of any importance in Hollywood, dead or alive, who has not

Hard Core

Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"
LINDA WILLIAMS

Williams moves beyond the impasse of anti-porn/anti-censorship position-taking to analyze what hard-core film pornography is and does. She traces the roots of contemporary hard core's quest to see the "truth" of sex back to the origins of cinema itself—in motion studies of women's bodily movements. She then follows the generic development of hard core through its silent, primitive stag form and into feature-length narratives and up to its recent sadomasochistic and "couple's market" permutations. \$18.95

Acting in the Cinema

JAMES NAREMORE

"Addresses a neglected aspect of film criticism, the contribution of the actor. . . Will contribute significantly to the needed discussion of modern acting under the pressures of technology."—*Choice*
Naremore focuses on the work of film acting, showing what players contribute to movies. He develops a useful means of analyzing performance in the age of mechanical reproduction; at the same time, he reveals the ideological implications behind various approaches to acting, and suggests ways that behavior on the screen can be linked to the presentation of self in society. \$27.50

Invisible Storytellers

Voice-Over Narration in American Fiction Film
SARAH KOZLOFF

New in paper—Voice-over narration has long been an integral part of American movies. Kozloff examines and analyzes voice-over narration and refutes the assumptions that words should only play a minimal role in film, that "showing" is superior to "telling," or that the technique is inescapably authoritarian (the "voice of god"). \$9.95 paper

Thinking in Pictures

Dramatic Structure in D.W. Griffith's Biograph Films

JOYCE E. JESIONOWSKI

New in paper—Jesionowski shows for the first time, in rigorous shot-by-shot analyses, what Griffith really did—and allows us to understand the implications for film narrative in general. \$10.95 paper

Prices in U. S. dollars.

**University of
California Press**
Berkeley 94720

been interrogated over and over again?" *An Empire of Their Own* is based, the author tells us, on 'nearly one hundred . . . taped interviews throughout 1981 and 1982'; which gives some idea how long it took Gabler to transcribe and construct the book around them.

The result is probably the definitive study of the emergence and the apotheosis of Adolph Zukor, Carl Laemmle, Louis B. Mayer, William Fox, Harry Cohn and Jack and Harry Warner. Since, between them, these men set up six of the seven major studios, Gabler's book is probably also the most concise history of the birth, growth and golden age of Hollywood that we are likely to get.

An Empire of Their Own comes in two parts: the first deals with how those seven (and a few others less famous, like cinema showman Roxy Rothafel and MGM's power behind the throne, Nick Schenck) built their empire; the second with what it looked like when they were through. It is often frankly anecdotal: Gabler can't resist a good story (like that of Jack Warner conducting a conversation with Zanuck while sitting on the toilet, and Zanuck dutifully pulling the chain in the midst of his answer), whether it fits in or not. And it is, in places, sloppily edited. But the sense of a bizarre business, run like no other but at the same time infinitely more profitable than most, emerges sharply and enjoyably from its pages. So, too, does the crucial difference, so often obliterated by the blanket term 'Hollywood', between the studios' style and output.

Gabler is, however, as the book's subtitle suggests, not content with a straightforward history. What has evidently come to fascinate him as he has worked through the material is the history of Zukor, Laemmle and Co as a classic story of the assimilation of an immigrant group by a new nation. 'Something drove the young Hollywood Jews to a ferocious, even pathological, embrace of America,' he writes. 'Something drove them to deny whatever they had been before settling there.'

It is a seductive thesis and, in its broad theme, undeniably true. What the Hollywood Jews created was a whole new production system, dedicated to portraying an America remade into the kind of country of which they would want to be citizens. Of course, immigrant entrepreneurs were doing much the same thing in other major industries during the 20s, including (and especially) that of organised crime. But none had the same opportunity to create an imaginary world and then relentlessly

foist it upon their fellow countrymen to the point where it even began to shape the real one.

But it is a point to which Gabler comes back again and again with such insistence that it begins to create its own counter-argument. Did the Hollywood Jews really deny their European past? What about the Lubitsch comedies? What about the old world (not to say olde worlde) costume dramas which were a staple of production? What about *Grand Hotel*, *The Life of Emile Zola* and *Mrs Miniver*?

And was it really the moguls who shaped the world that Hollywood projected? Many sources—including, presumably, some consulted by Gabler—suggest that writers, directors and studio production chiefs did the empire's work, while the emperor concerned himself with the major diplomatic decisions and was otherwise content to oversee the results. But writers, directors and studio production chiefs end up as little more than spear-carriers in Gabler's empire.

Indeed, anything which detracts from the wonderfully heroic notion of a group of men from the tenements of the East heading West to build their wonderland tends to be pushed into the background. Economics, for instance. The Hollywood moguls were astute businessmen who did not so much create a new form of business and financial management as ride the wave of 1920s growth, evolving the necessary structures as they went. All this is recognised and described in the middle of Gabler's chapters. But it is marginalised by the obligatory rhetoric of the opening and closing paragraphs, which is where the thesis has come to rest.

Take this, for example, dealing with the deeper motives behind the moguls' business moves: 'If one couldn't control the world of real power and influence, the august world of big business, finance and politics, through the studio one could create a whole fictive universe that one *could* control. And that was exactly how the studio apparatus came to function [. . .] The moguls made the studios in their images to actualise their own dreams.' Manifestly, the studios existed to do—and did—a lot more than this.

Gabler's determination to force his (fundamentally valid) point just a little too far is the one flaw in what is otherwise an admirably researched and very readable history of the growth of a major industry and art form which coincided with—and thus both reflected and influenced—a crucial period of social change.

NICK RODDICK

PICTURES FROM AN EXHIBITION

THE MOVING IMAGE
An International History of
Film, Television and Video

by John Wyver

Basil Blackwell/BFI/£35, (paper)
£15

'Moving images now affect all of us, sometimes in ways we may not even pause to think about.' Not John Wyver's words, but those of Prince Charles, in his foreword to *The Moving Image*—hinting at an area of social and ideological concerns which, as it turns out, the book largely ignores. Otherwise, the significant omissions are remarkably few. To cover the entire history not only of cinema, but of moving images in all their proliferating guises, in just over 300 pages is an impressive achievement. To have done so lucidly and comprehensively, with a minimum of factual errors, is something of a triumph.

Wyver's brief, he explains in his introduction, was to produce 'neither a catalogue nor a guide-book' to the Museum of the Moving Image, but 'an accompaniment and complement'. In this he has notably succeeded. Anyone who rounds off a visit to MOMI by picking up a copy of *The Moving Image* in the bookshop will find their experience enlarged and enriched—and may well be inspired to pay a return visit.

It was also his aim to draw together 'perhaps for the first time... an outline history of both the cinema and television'. This he does up to a point—or rather, after a point. Though the development of the two media is traced in parallel, and cross-connections established, it's not until more than halfway through the book, with the period following the Second World War, that the two main strands start to knit together. From here on, the often uneasy symbiosis between film and TV carries the narrative forward with growing momentum.

Indeed, the first half of *The Moving Image* generally seems less engrossing—partly because the earlier material is altogether more familiar, giving a sense, now and again, of a dutiful trek over some well-mapped terrain—but also because of the way the material is arranged. Rather than tell his story chronologically, advancing all the main elements together (film language, the rise of Hollywood, technology, animation, the avant-garde, etc), Wyver chooses to progress each one up to an appropriate point and then go back for the next, like a cat transporting a litter of kittens. This makes for a disruptive

reading experience, oddly reminiscent of those sadistic board-games which repeatedly plunge you right back to the start. Oh no, you find yourself muttering, not Edwin S. Porter again.

Still, what the arrangement lacks in continuity it makes up for in clarity. Wyver's style is clean and terse, and he can pack a lot of information into a small space with no feeling of undue compression. Endowed, thanks to his dual background as writer and programme-maker, with a sure grasp of both technical and cultural essentials, he can give equally succinct accounts of holography and of the significance of the *nouvelle vague*.

Omissions, in a work of this kind, are the name of the game, and the absence of this film-maker or that is no cause for reproach. One or two national industries, though, may feel unjustly slighted: Africa and South America are scrupulously covered, but Australia (let alone New Zealand) rates not a mention. Southern Europe doesn't do too well, either: Spain, Portugal, Yugoslavia, Greece, Bulgaria and Rumania have all fallen off the movie-making map. And while some degree of US/Anglocentrism is perhaps inevitable, to devote just two pages to the entire television output of the world outside Britain and the United States seems a little ungenerous.

Also absent is anything that might be taken for a personal viewpoint. Wyver makes the standard disclaimer that any 'mistakes and misjudgments are... all my own'; yet reading *The Moving Image*, the unremitting soundness of its judgments becomes almost oppressive. After a while, one begins to long for something quirky, opinionated or even downright perverse. But it's perhaps unreasonable to look for such elements in what is, after all, an adjunct to a museum culture, impersonal and apolitical.

By the same token, the lack of any ideological underpinning was probably to be expected, although a passing reference, here and there, might have alerted the interested reader to explore further. As co-author of a study of Trevor Griffiths (and with one on Dennis Potter in the pipeline), Wyver is well aware that what we watch—and the means by which it's shown to us—can be loaded any number of ways. Such considerations are crucial to any history of the moving image; but they would need a book very different from the present one. On the strength of *The Moving Image*, though, it's a book which John Wyver might be ideally qualified to write.

PHILIP KEMP

1990
EDITIONVARIETY
INTERNATIONAL
FILM GUIDE

Edited by Peter Cowie

Now owned by the world's #1 entertainment newspaper, the **I.F.G. 1990** offers the best coverage yet of the international film scene—packed with illustrated reports from some 60 countries, a 50 page survey of Spanish Cinema Now, and a host of invaluable reference sections devoted to Festivals, Archives, Film Schools, and upcoming major releases.

Approximately 528 pages with more than 200 colour & BxW photographs. £9.95 /\$15.95 ISBN 0 233 98503 4

U.K.: published Nov. 15 by ANDRE DEUTSCH
U.S.: published late Dec. by SAMUEL FRENCH TRADE

Or write to:
VARIETY, 34-35 Newman Street, London W1P 3PD,
phone (01) 637-3663
(or contact the VARIETY bureau in your country)



CHANGE PARTNERS

BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE 1990 CALENDAR

TWENTY-FOUR STARS pair up in classic – and occasionally unexpected – fashion for some of the most memorable scenes in cinema. The *British Film Institute 1990 Calendar* includes the dynamic double acts of Grace Kelly and Cary Grant, Vivien Leigh and Robert Taylor, Lauren Bacall and Humphrey Bogart, Katharine Hepburn and James Stewart, Eva Marie Saint and Marlon Brando, Dorothy Dandridge and Harry Belafonte... and more!

At £8.95, the *British Film Institute 1990 Calendar* is the perfect Christmas gift for film buffs and star-gazers alike.

bfi To: BFI Calendar, Publications Department, British Film Institute,
29/35 Rathbone St, London W1P 1AG, Tel: 01-636 3289.

Please send me _____ BFI 1990 Calendars @ £8.95 each inc p&ap.

☐ I enclose a cheque/P.O. (crossed and made payable to the British Film Institute) for £ _____.

☐ I authorise the BFI to charge £ _____ to my VISA/ACCESS

account no. _____

Card expiry date _____ Signed _____

NAME _____ ADDRESS _____

Offer subject to availability

DIGITAL FILMS

16mm Film Post-Production Courses starting at various dates during the year.

These are hands-on practical only courses, comprising:

Synching Rushes
Edge Numbering
Logging, etc.
Editing
Track Laying
Attending a Dubbing Session

Courses are of five day duration
10 am to 5.30 pm.

Cost £250 plus V.A.T.

Pupils will work in groups of four.

Digital Films is a fully professional post-production editing facility company.

For further information contact

Barry Haigh,

Digital Films, Unit 3 Annandale Studios,
R/O. 147 Chiswick High Road, London W4 2HE
Telephone 01-995 8974

SIGHT & SOUND BINDERS

Each binder holds 2 years supply, and is covered in blue Balacron with gold lettering.

Price £5.25, £6.25 including p. & p. (\$11.00).

British Film Institute,
Publications Department,
21 Stephen Street, London W1P 1PL

contacts

Librairie du Cinéma

24, RUE DU COLISEE 75008 PARIS
TEL. (1) 43.59.17.71

BOOK REVIEWS

KIRK AND BULL

THE MAN WHO SHOT GARBO The Hollywood Photographs of Clarence Sinclair Bull

Text by Terence Pepper
and John Kobal
Simon & Schuster/£19.95

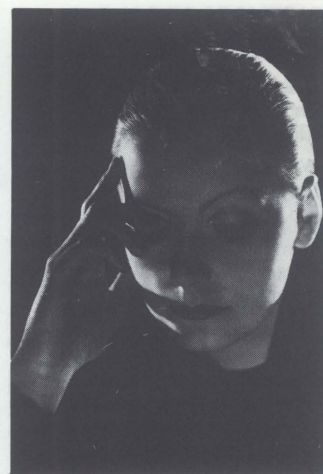
LIGHT YEARS Three Decades Photographing Among the Stars

by Douglas Kirkland
Thames and Hudson/£24.95

Our coffee table is here straining under the combined weight of two handsome volumes which, between them, sum up the history of that peculiar sub-branch of movie-made culture, the still image of the star. Aside from the recurrence of one or two faces between the books—such long-lived lead performers as Maurice Chevalier, Judy Garland and Katharine Hepburn were caught by both Bull and Kirkland—and the almost interchangeable details of the early lives of the snappers chronicled in the introductions (Bull was from Montana, Kirkland from Ontario, but both left nowhere for fame, glamour and the darkroom), the two books offer such a contrast that they fit together as an almost perfect yin and yang.

Bull was the chief photographer in residence at MGM, the studio with a thousand stars (Louis B. Mayer and 64 of them pose together on the endpapers, which are notable for the off-centre fed-up look of Dame May Whitty, the fixed grin of Keye Luke and Robert Benchley falling asleep amid the brighter luminaries of the Metro firmament), and his works are almost exclusively in cool, perfectly lit black and white and concerned entirely with the image Louis B. Mayer—of whom it was said by his contractees, 'we don't need a union, we need Abraham Lincoln'—wanted to project. Much is made in the accompanying notes of Bull's special rapport with Greta Garbo, and of her insistence that she always be photographed in the character she was playing at the time.

Occasionally, this approach pays off startlingly well because Bull was a far better technician than many others who worked at MGM, and his portrait shots often display more visual flair than the frequently rather dull-looking 'quality' product the studio was turning out. There's a striking shot of silent star Molly Malone in a set fashioned after *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, taken at a time when no Hollywood film would dare such an experiment, and such genre-based performers as Anna May Wong, Tim McCoy (silhouetted against a Western sunset), Boris



Garbo by Clarence Bull.

Karloff (imperious on the throne of Fu Manchu) and Peter Lorre reveal far more of their mystique in Bull's photographs than they do in the stodgy, studio-bland exotics, Westerns and horror movies MGM felt obliged to dirty its hands with to compete with Universal or Warners.

For the rest, we have an almost obsessional series of shots emphasising the shadows cast by Hedy Lamarr's eyelashes, bizarre and rather sad attempts to turn such attractive and lively women as Angela Lansbury, Lucille Ball, Anita Loos and Marion Davies into conventional screen goddesses, a succession of pleasant young men (Bing Crosby, Charles Boyer, Clark Gable, Robert Montgomery) posed amiably in smart clothes as if auditioning as a replacement for Zeppo Marx, and a remarkable succession of shots of Garbo in character which, especially when set beside the grinning, squinting Jean Harlow, make the great star look like an especially well-dressed corpse lying in state to be admired.

Kirkland came along in the early 1960s, just after Bull retired, and plied his trade for the pictorial magazines rather than a studio. He represented a different approach to stardom, and his photographs tend to be in colour, to use bizarre techniques and settings (faking a tear for Judy Garland; a paste-up montage for the Andy Warhol Factory; Vanessa Redgrave smoking as she falls through a paper Union Jack; Jamie Lee Curtis in a closet) to effect a picture of a person showing their true colours, which is to say a star revealing the proverbial real tinsel. Sometimes, Kirkland's intimate approach can be startling, as when a close-up of Audrey Hepburn's face reveals a spider-web network of pores and lines in the gorgeous mask, but often the impression—Ann-Margret in a stars and stripes corset on an *Easy Rider* bike, Esai Morales diving headfirst on

BOOK REVIEWS

to the pavement—is of contrived looniness.

Kirkland is the end product of the *Blowup* approach to photography, not quite ready to take the step into the even more glamorous world of the much shot-at photojournalist who is fast becoming a mythic hero to match the early 30s fast-talking reporter. There's a faint sadness in the way thirty years of 'revealing' portraits have taken him from intimate and quite touching looks at Monroe, Bardot, Garland and Jeanne Moreau to strained attempts to get inside performers like Sting, Anthony Edwards, Morgan Fairchild and Brigitte Nielsen, who barely register on the surface. Oddly enough, the most interesting work here comes from that lost decade, the 70s, which Kirkland catches through such images as Dennis Hopper drifting in the desert with a film-can, Francis Ford Coppola and shaggy entourage (George Lucas included) in wide-angle on a rooftop, and Jack Nicholson gripping a lighted match between his teeth.

KIM NEWMAN

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

CHARLES BARR teaches at the University of East Anglia and is writing the 1940s volume of *The History of the British Film*, taking up where Rachael Low left off . . . PETER GREEN is an architect and writer based in Munich . . . JOHN HARKNESS is film critic for *Now* magazine in Toronto . . . MARK MORDUE is a freelance writer and journalist in Australia, contributor to *The Sydney Morning Herald* and to *Rolling Stone* . . . KIM NEWMAN has just published a novel, *The Night Mayor* (Simon and Schuster) . . . GERALD PRATLEY is director of the Ontario Film Institute . . . GAVIN SMITH is assistant editor of *Film Comment*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ARTIFICIAL EYE for *India Song*, *Jésus de Montréal*, *The Decline of the American Empire*, photograph of Denys Arcand.

AUSTRALIAN FILM COMMISSION for *Bingo*, *Bridesmaids and Braces*, photograph of Gillian Armstrong.

BASELINE for photograph of Jo Imeson.

BFI PRODUCTION for *Fellow Traveller*, *Melancholia*, photograph of Ben Gibson.

CAPFI FILMS for *The Story of the Wind*.

CURZON for *Henry V* (Branagh), *Manon des Sources*.

ROBERT DALRYMPLE for photograph of Ian Dalrymple.

ENTERTAINMENT for *Starstruck*, *Wired*.

FINNISH FILM FOUNDATION/VILLEALFA FILMS for *Crime and Punishment*, *Leningrad Cowboys Go America*, *Calamari Union*, *Shadows in Paradise*.

HUNGAROFILM for *Whooping Cough*.

ELLIOTT LEWITT/DON GUEST for *Shadow of China*.

METRO PICTURES for *Camp de Thiaroye*.

LOOSEYARD PRODUCTIONS for *1871*.

NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA for *Sitting in Limbo*, *Ikwe*, *Mile Zero*, *No Address*, *Alias William James*, *Foster Child*, *90 Days*, *The King Chronicle*, *Get a Job*, *The Dingles*, *The Cat Came Back*, *Every Dog's Guide to Complete Home Safety*, photograph of NFB headquarters in Montreal.

THE OTHER CINEMA for *Crazy Family*.

PALACE PICTURES for *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover*.

TFI/PROGEFI/UGC for *Une Chambre en Ville*.

DON RANVAUD for *Speaking Parts*, photograph of himself.

RITZY for *High Tide*.

UIP for *Do the Right Thing*, *Mrs Soffel*, *Shirley Valentine*.

WARNER BROS for *New York Stories*, *Star 80*, *Dead Calm*.

NFA STILL COLLECTION for *Henry V* (Olivier), *The Lion Has Wings*, *The Man in Grey*, *Channel Incident*, *World of Plenty*, *The First Days*, *The Music Room*, *Gina*, *Rejeanne Padovani*, *Max*, *Mon Amour*, *L'Intervista*, *Taipei Story*, *And Then* photographs of Irving Thalberg, Harry Cohn, the set of *Losey's M*.

PRINTED BY The Jason Press Ltd, Hertford, England.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES: (4 issues) £8.60 including postage. Back issues, where available, at current price (£2.15 including postage and packing). Binders to hold two years' issues £6.25, postage included (\$11.00).

PUBLICATION DATES: 1st January, April, July and October.

SOLE AGENTS FOR U.S.A.:

Eastern News Distributors Inc. SIGHT AND SOUND (USPS 496-040) is published quarterly by the British Film Institute.

Subscription price is \$15.80 per year. Second class postage paid at Sandusky, Ohio, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster send change of address to Eastern News Distributors, 1671 East 16th St, Suite 176, Brooklyn, NY 11229-2901. Newsstand distribution by Eastern News Distributors, 1130 Cleveland Rd, Sandusky, OH 44870.

RUSSIAN AND SOVIET CINEMA: Continuity and Change

A conference organised by the
InterUniversity History Film Consortium
at the Imperial War Museum
17-19 July 1990

This is the first major international conference on Soviet cinema in the context of the origins and history of Stalinism, since glasnost invigorated the Soviet intellectual scene. It will examine the formative stages of Russian and Soviet cinema to 1930; the impact of Stalinism; and the role of the cinema in recent retrospectives on the Stalinist period. The international programme of 23 speakers will include nine from the Soviet Union and viewing of Soviet film from the period.

Further information from
Jim Ballantyne, BUFVC, 55 Greek Street, London
W1V 5LR, UK
Tel: 01-734 3687



STAGE & SCREEN



My long established informative catalogue of books, magazines & ephemera on the CINEMA and THEATRE is published every six weeks or so.

Two first-class stamps (overseas three international reply vouchers) brings the current issue.

A.E. COX (Dept. SS),
21 Cecil Road, Itchen, Southampton SO2 7HX
Tel. 0703 - 447989

(I am always interested in purchasing relevant out-of-print material)

cineastes/buffs

books stills music mags

catalogue subscription:
50p (5 IRCs)

decorum books
24 Cloudesley Square
London N1

ON NOW

■ BATMAN

(Warners)

A witty and distorted reinvention of the elemental *Batman* story, with Michael Keaton's bewildered Bruce Wayne and Jack Nicholson's manic Joker meshed in a dance of emotional and physical disfigurement, and Tim Burton's Gothic steam-and-neon vision of Gotham City providing a perfect setting for the match. The antagonists are so strong that the supporting players, especially Kim Basinger's drippy heroine, get lost in the action; but there are enough dark jokes, comic-book tropes—the batwing aircraft silhouetted against the moon—and overwhelming sets to compensate for the surprising shortage of spectacular action. The much-criticised casting of Keaton in fact works notably well: this is precisely the kind of lost soul who would feel he had to dress up as Dracula to face the world. (Jack Palance, Michael Gough, Pat Hingle.)

■ HEATHERS

(Premier)

A jet black high-school comedy about the chic clique—three girls called Heather and one Veronica (Winona Ryder)—and the plans of junior sociopath Christian Slater to overturn their rule of the recess. Dragging Ryder with him, Slater embarks on a course of slapstick murders passed off as teenage suicides, and death becomes the latest teenage craze. . . . Not for the faint-hearted, this unseemly, all-out attack on the values incarnated, say, in John Hughes' *Pretty in Pink* and *The Breakfast Club*, has a distinctive DayGlo look and a tone which may be judged by the mourner touching up her hairdo with holy water during her best friend's funeral. Family values? Food for worms. (Director, Michael Lehmann.)

■ SEX, LIES & VIDEOTAPE

(Virgin)

Surprise winner of the Cannes Palme d'Or, Steven Soderbergh's first feature is the not-so-deceptively simple tale of a yuppie Baton Rouge lawyer whose fling with his sister-in-law is destructively complemented by his apparently frigid wife's attraction to an enigmatic visitor. The sex, discussed in detail, and the videotape, bizarrely linked to the sex, no doubt account for the film's popular success; but it is the theme of lying—of Tennessee Williams-style 'mendacity'—which provides its distinctiveness as deflected social commentary. This 'modern' morality play is in the long run rather old-fashioned, as are its gestures towards the conventions of screwball comedy.

In a way, however, it is this very quality which lends the picture an edge of provocation. (Andie MacDowell.)

□ AMSTERDAMMED

(Vestron)

Flodder and *The Lift* marked Dick Maas as a director to watch, and *Amsterdammed*, the story of a murderous diver haunting the city's canals, confirms the presence of a talent to rival Verhoeven's. Told with panache (a breathtaking speedboat chase), a nice line in black humour and a peppering of quirky asides: a decided cut above the current contenders in the stalk-and-slash stakes. (Huub Stapel, Monique Van de Ven.)

□ APARTMENT ZERO

(Mainline)

Allegorical thriller, set in Buenos Aires, about the disturbing, magnetic power of a former mercenary. Colin Firth, as a fastidious honorary Englishman, and Hart Bochner, the sharklike American killer, perform an intermittently diverting dance of death. (Director, Martin Donovan.)

□ THE BEAR

(Columbia Tri-Star)

Orphaned cub gambols in Canadian fastness; eventually softens hearts of three grizzled nineteenth-century hunters. Comforting morality yarn, from the maker of *Quest for Fire*, distinguished by seamless animatronic effects. The real Kodiak bears naturally steal the show. (Tcheky Karyo, Jack Wallace; director, Jean-Jacques Annaud.)

□ BULL DURHAM

(Rank)

The familiar show-biz tale—one star rises while the other falls—this time set on the playing fields of minor-league baseball. A charmingly light touch by first-time director Ron Shelton takes in folkloric comedy as well as the mythic high notes (a tag line from Walt Whitman). Susan Sarandon, as guide and commentator, mulls over which star per season she'll take into her bed (for lessons in poetry and 'life wisdom'). (Kevin Costner, Tim Robbins.)

□ A CHORUS OF DISAPPROVAL

(Hobo)

This first film adaptation of an Alan Ayckbourn play (a timid widower, Jeremy Irons, becomes embroiled in several awkward backstage romances during a Scarborough production of *The Beggar's Opera*) receives the never less than direct Michael Winner treatment. The stars, notably Anthony Hopkins as the twitching vulnerable Welsh director, have a feast playing amateur theatre folk; but the play's slow disquieting agony is largely missing. (Prunella Scales, Sylvia Sims, Richard Briers, Jenny Seagrove.)

□ DEAD POETS SOCIETY

(Warners)

The new English master (impish Robin Williams) at a suffocatingly old-world New England boys' prep school

encourages the class of '59 to take the path stepped out by Whitman and Thoreau.

Adolescent rites of passage, cloyingly rendered, end in tragedy and triumph. (Robert Sean Leonard; director, Peter Weir.)

□ EARTH GIRLS ARE EASY

(Fox)

Furry Jeff Goldblum and companions go for night on the town after crash landing in Geena Davis' Los Angeles swimming-pool. Attractive performances, but Julien Temple is still unsure how to handle musical numbers. (Damon Wayans.)

□ EL DORADO

(Virgin)

A curious choice of subject and director for the most expensive Spanish film ever (1bn pesetas), since this story of an ill-fated sixteenth-century conquistador expedition up the Amazon has already been stunningly treated by Werner Herzog, and Carlos Saura is at his best at his most intimate. Despite a few striking scenes, the film seems long (even in this cut version) and strangely lacking in tension, finally resolving itself into a catalogue of depravity. (Omero Antonutti, Lambert Wilson.)

□ FIELD OF DREAMS

(Guild)

Ballplayer's son Kevin Costner turns back on hearth and home and embraces 60s counter-culture. Celestial voices urge him to create baseball field on his Iowa farm. Result, reunion with youthful shade of his old dad. Slow-footed flummery lacking inner conviction. (Burt Lancaster, James Earl Jones; director, Phil Alden Robinson.)

□ I'M GONNA GIT YOU, SUCKA!

(UIP)

A painfully funny skit on the blaxploitation movies of the early 70s from writer-director-star Keenan Ivory Wayans, who enlists his old superspade idols (Bernie Casey, Isaac Hayes, Jim Brown) to prevent John Vernon from flooding the ghetto with gold chains. Antonio Fargas contributes a cherishable parody of *Superfly*, complete with goldfish swimming in his high heels.

□ THE IRON TRIANGLE

(Medusa)

The first Vietnam film to show the war from both sides: heroic Vietcong foot soldier struggles with his superiors; Beau Bridges lumbers through the jungle with the air of a latter-day Slim Pickens. Clichés galore, cutprice explosions. (Liem Whatley, Haing S. Ngor, Johnny Hallyday; director, Eric Weston.)

□ KILLING DAD

(Palace)

Grotesque semi-comedy in which Richard E. Grant tracks errant long-lost father to tatty seaside ménage with Julie Walters and tries to go through with his murder plan. Matters fail to catch fire, despite

the reliable cast. (Director, Michael Austin.)

□ MAJOR LEAGUE

(Fox)

Strident comedy about a no-hope baseball team groomed for failure only to discover last-minute reserves of aggression and skill. Raucously effective and unashamedly crude, but the cast generates unexpectedly tolerable charm. (Tom Berenger, Charlie Sheen, Corbin Bernsen; director, David S. Ward.)

□ PATTI ROCKS

(Premier)

Director David Burton Morris reveals the John Cassavetes touch and a good deal more in this singular and surprisingly affecting winter's tale (a sequel, twelve years on, to *Loose Ends*) of two vulnerable men—loquacious, foul-mouthed, friends for life—on an impossible mission to talk some sense into the indomitable heroine of the title. A striking feature of this beautifully acted three-hander is its ability to change tone and pace as swiftly and effortlessly as human emotions switch from rage to love. (Chris Mulkey, John Jenkins, Karen Landry.)

□ PET SEMATARY

(UIP)

Another from the Stephen King production-line: Dale Midkiff learns the hard way that it's not smart to use Indian magic to bring back pets and children. Director Mary Louise Lambert throws in a few scares, but King's own screenplay prunes all the intriguing motivations from the book. (Denise Crosby, Fred Gwynne.)

□ SHIRLEY VALENTINE

(UIP)

As Liverpool housewife seizing opportunity to rescue herself from stagnation, Pauline Collins constructs a calculated if rather hollow triumph by confiding her illusions, hopes and scorns direct to camera. Willy Russell's one-woman play, predictably expanded for the screen to incorporate a gallery of best-of-British cameos and Hellenic sunsets, is uneasily matched by Lewis Gilbert's sturdily pragmatic style. (Tom Conti, Bernard Hill, Joanna Lumley.)

□ WHEN THE WHALES CAME

(Fox)

Recluse on island cliff-top (Paul Scofield) whittles his bird sculptures and carries a dark secret which two dauntless youngsters prise from him. Old-style children's picture from a Michael Morpurgo story: seaweed smells; sound ecology; convincing narwhales. (Helen Mirren; director, Clive Rees.)

□ WIRED

(Entertainment)

Bob Woodward and a taxi-driving angel take the deceased John Belushi (Michael Chiklis) on a tour of his past. A sleazy biopic alternating between recreations of the star's stage and tv routines and scenes of his ceaseless drug-abuse. (Patti d'Arbanville, Ray Sharkey; director, Larry Pearce.)

THE NATIONAL FILM & TELEVISION SCHOOL

Announces the launch of a new series of
research publications in collaboration with
the London Business School

the first title (available November 1st) is

FEATURE FILM DEVELOPMENT IN THE UK

All enquiries to Simon Mallin (enclosing a stamped addressed envelope)
at the address below. Please mark your envelope LBS.

**Applications are invited for the three-year professional course starting
Autumn, 1990. Contact the Admissions Department for Prospectus and Forms.
Application deadline: 15th January, 1990.**

NATIONAL FILM & TELEVISION SCHOOL (DEPT. SS), BEACONSFIELD STUDIOS,
BEACONSFIELD, BUCKS. Telephone: (0494) 671234



BERTRAND TAVERNIER'S

*Life
and
Nothing But*

starring

PHILIPPE NOIRET SABINE AZEMA

COMING SOON

CHELSEA CINEMA
206 KING'S ROAD SW3 3513742

RENOIR BRUNSWICK SQ. WC1
RUSSELL SQUARE TUBE
TELEPHONE 837 8402

— An —
**Artificial Eye
Release**